From Warm Heart to Warm Heart

The Transmission of Dharma in the Modern World

Interviews from Mandala, *1982–2017*

A *Mandala* Ebook

FPMT

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Cover: His Holiness the Dalai Lama being greeted by Jim Blumenthal, Portland, Oregon, US, May 2013; photo by Marc Sakamoto. Blue sky photo by Outside the Fray, Flickr Creative Commons attribution.

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About FPMT

Editor's Introduction

It was Yangsi Rinpoche who, when describing how Dharma is transmitted, coined the phrase "from warm heart to warm heart."

Even though he is a lharampa geshe, Rinpoche did not emphasize study, debate, or even meditation as the true key to transmission, but relationship. The Dharma goes beyond words, and it seems that we take it in most whole-heartedly from those with whom we have a deep connection. Is it not true that our studies progress when we open our hearts to our teachers, and that our practice flourishes in a context of caring, support, and friendship? To quote Dr. Anne Carolyn Klein in this volume, "transmission is about love."

In reading over the interviews published here, it is the caring, sincerity, and altruism of the interviewees that seem to stand out—their heartfelt wish to help others by playing their part in the dissemination of the Buddha's teachings. And the "given" behind all the aspects of transmission that they discuss is relationship: between teachers and students, among Dharma friends, and within Buddhist communities. On the basis of warm human relationships, they make clear, the Dharma will take root and grow.

The interviews in this volume concern the transmission of Dharma and all originally appeared in *Mandala*, in print or online. This anthology aims at fostering not only Dharma knowledge and practice, but also relationship among all who respect and implement the Buddha's teachings.

We at *Mandala* wish you enjoyment and benefit from reading it.

Donna Lynn Brown
Associate Editor, *Mandala*

Foreword by Lama Zopa Rinpoche: Some Thoughts on the Future of Buddhism

An excerpt from an article written by Lama Zopa Rinpoche for The Path of the Buddha *by Renuka Singh (Penguin, 2004)*

In order to hazard a guess at the future of Buddhism in the world, we need to look at how it has survived and spread since our precious founder, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, first turned the wheel of Dharma 2,500 years ago.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha revealed the path to enlightenment so that all sentient beings would be happy and free from suffering. Having experienced the bliss of liberation and enlightenment himself, he realized that all beings had the seed of enlightenment within their minds and could attain that ultimate goal by following the same path that he had. Therefore, starting with the four noble truths, he began to give teachings according to the various levels of mind of those who came to him for instruction.

Under his guidance, his disciples began to practice, and many were able to gain the same realizations that he had, proving that others could attain the enlightenment he himself had attained. As his students became teachers, their own disciples gained realizations of the path, showing that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings were indeed transmissible and thus beginning the oral tradition that survives to this day.

For fifteen hundred years, Buddhism flourished in India and spread from there in all directions, to South-East Asia; Sri Lanka; China, Japan, and Korea; countries to the west; and Nepal and Tibet.

Around 650 CE, the king of Tibet, Songtsen Gampo, married Buddhist women from Nepal and China and, under their influence, began to introduce Buddhism to Tibet. One hundred years later, the king Trisong Detsen invited the great Indian monk-scholar Shantarakshita and the tantric yogi Padmasambhava to firmly establish Buddhism in Tibet. Shantarakshita, the "Great Abbot Bodhisattva," introduced the monastic tradition to Tibet, ordained the first five Tibetan monks and inspired the construction of Tibet's first monastery, Samyé. Padmasambhava, "Guru Rinpoche," pacified hindrances to the establishment of Buddhism and introduced the practice of Vajrayana to Tibet.

Over the next century, the practice of Buddhism spread gradually throughout Tibet, until the anti-Buddhist king Langdarma ascended to the throne and began a violent campaign to destroy Buddhism in Tibet. Within a few years, the Dharma had all but disappeared from Central Tibet, but survived to a certain extent far to the east and west.

Thus fragmented, the practice of Dharma began to degenerate, and many corrupt practices and ideas were introduced to Tibet. Despairing at the situation, the king of Gugé, in Western Tibet, invited the renowned Indian pandit Atisha to Tibet to re-introduce the pure practice of Dharma.

I can't talk much about Atisha's life here, but a detailed description is given in Pabongka Rinpoche's book, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. Here we see how, like Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, Atisha was born into a royal family but abandoned his inheritance in favor of Dharma practice. He studied with many teachers and realized the central importance of the loving, compassionate bodhichitta in the practice of Dharma. In order to further his study and practice of bodhichitta, Atisha undertook a long and dangerous sea voyage to Indonesia, to meet Serlingpa, the pre-eminent teacher of bodhichitta of the time.

When he went to Tibet in 1042, Atisha carried with him the two crucial Dharma lineages of method and wisdom, and when we talk even now about the survival of Buddhism in the world, we have to talk in terms of these two lineages.

The wisdom lineage passed from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha to Manjushri and then down on through great masters such as Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti to Atisha. The method lineage passed from the Buddha to Maitreya and then down on through Asanga, Vasubandhu, Haribhadra and, of course, Lama Serlingpa, also to Atisha. Thus, combined in the holy mind of the great Atisha, the two lineages of method and wisdom arrived in Tibet.

In Tibet, Lama Atisha wrote a very short text entitled *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, which for the first time presented all the teachings of the Buddha in an organized, step-like path, making it very easy for the individual practitioner to get an overview of the entire path and to understand what practice might be relevant to her or him. Of course, the benefits of Atisha's coming to Tibet are infinite, beyond measure, but even if the only thing he'd done was to write this text, that would have made it worthwhile.

Atisha's work was the original lamrim (steps of the path) text, and over the subsequent centuries, many lamas from all Tibetan traditions wrote commentaries on Atisha's *Lamp*, and the lamrim genre is one of the hallmarks of Tibetan Buddhism. Perhaps the most famous of all lamrim commentaries is Lama Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo* (*The Great Treatise on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment*). Lama Tsongkhapa was a great yogi and scholar who wrote many profound texts on all aspects of sutra and tantra, including several lamrim commentaries of varying length, but his *Great Treatise* is a work of unparalleled genius.

Lama Tsongkhapa also founded the Gelug tradition, one of the four great schools of Tibetan Buddhism. He and his disciples also founded some of the greatest monasteries in Tibet, including the three near Lhasa—Ganden, which he founded himself, and Drepung, Sera—and Tashilhunpo, Kumbum, and Labrang, in other parts of the country—which were founded by various of his disciples and were like small towns, housing tens of thousands of monks.

In the Gelug monasteries, the monks followed a rigorous schedule of memorization, study, debate, and practice. Often they would forego sleep in order to debate all night. One of my teachers, Geshe Rabten, has written in detail about life in the monasteries (*Life of a Tibetan Monk*), and his book is well worth reading to find out what an impressive and intensive schedule the monks followed.

By some estimates, more than twenty percent of Tibetan men were monks. This is an important fact to note when thinking about the future of Buddhism, because the viability of the Dharma in a certain country or place is determined by whether or not the lineage of the monastic ordination exists there. These days there seems to be a tendency, especially in the West, to downplay the importance of the ordination of monks and nuns in the survival of Buddhism. Suffice it to say that wherever one cannot be ordained, Buddhism is dead.

Many Tibetan practitioners, however, were not monks but laypeople, and some of these led amazing ascetic lives high in the snow mountains of Tibet. Perhaps the most famous of all is Tibet's great yogi, Milarepa, who reached enlightenment under the guidance of his guru, Marpa the Translator.

In his early years, Milarepa studied black magic, and at the insistence of his mother, in order to avenge harm done to his family after his father had passed away, he caused a building to collapse, trapping and killing many of his mother's enemies inside. Later on, realizing the terrible mistake he had made, he sought out a Dharma teacher, and eventually found Marpa. However, instead of receiving teachings from his guru, Milarepa received what today people would call abuse. Marpa never missed an opportunity to publicly humiliate Milarepa, openly kicking him out of any teachings that he might manage to sneak into, and forced him to do unbelievably backbreaking work, building and tearing down a stone tower. Marpa instructed Milarepa to build a nine-story tower out of rocks, and when, after a great deal of effort carting the rocks from the remote location where he found them to the building site, Milarepa finally finished and proudly showed Marpa his handiwork, the guru shouted angrily, "Who told you to build this tower? Put every rock back exactly where you found it." When Milarepa had done this, Marpa then angrily demanded to know why he had taken down the tower he'd been told to build. This happened three or four times. Each time, Milarepa humbly accepted his guru's criticism, and with unshakable faith and devotion did exactly as he was told.

Eventually, Marpa sealed Milarepa into a cave and told him to meditate on impermanence and death and other important Dharma subjects until he had realized these topics. In this way, having essentially abandoned sleep, Milarepa's wisdom grew. After a few years, he had a dream that he should return home, which he did, to find his mother dead and the family home in ruins. Generating great renunciation, Milarepa then fled to the snow mountains, where he meditated in icy caves, wearing nothing but a simple cotton cloth. There he realized the nature of mind and attained enlightenment. He had spent so much time sitting in meditation that his buttocks were thick with calluses.

Why am I telling this story? It's simply to show how hard one has to practice in order to make serious spiritual progress. In Tibet there were many practitioners like Milarepa, which is why Buddhism flourished in Tibet. If it is to survive, let alone flourish, in the world today, this is the type of practice that must be done in order for the as yet unbroken lineages to continue.

When we talk about the propagation of Buddhism, we have to remember that there are two types of teaching—the words and the realizations. Of these, it is the latter that makes the difference. It is easy for the words to continue for centuries—all we need is a few good libraries. But without the

living experience of the meaning of the words that comes through purification, creation of merit, and effective meditation, the words are dry and tasteless and cannot be a vehicle for Buddhism to continue into the distant future. For this to happen, we need serious meditators spending years, if not their entire lives, in retreat under the supervision of experienced masters. Is this happening today?

Jan Willis's book, *Enlightened Beings*, tells the inspiring sacred biographies of six prominent tantric meditators from the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism, including that of the great Gyalwa Ensapa. Reading his story, we can understand the kind of practice required to ensure the survival of the lineage of the teachings. From an early age, he took teachings from many great masters; he studied the vast treatises of sutra and tantra; he became a monk; he undertook prolonged retreats in isolated places. As a result, he attained enlightenment in his lifetime. And of course, he was not the only one. Countless other practitioners in Tibet also followed similar courses of action and gained realization. How common is this in the world today? Even in Tibet, it no longer happens.

All this, then, is the answer to the future of Buddhism on earth. Even though there may have be an upsurge of interest in Tibetan Buddhism over the past decades, mainly due to China's brutal occupation of Tibet and the resulting exile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and more than one hundred thousand other Tibetans, which has brought Tibetan Buddhism to the attention of others in the world, my impression is that it is almost totally devoid of the depth that characterized the Buddhism of Tibet and other Asian countries in the early centuries of its introduction to them, and therefore, it may not last that long.

The future of Buddhism notwithstanding, what is the reason for this heightened interest in Buddhism, especially in the West? One would have to say, people turn to Buddhism because they want to be happy. Why Buddhism? Because they find through experience that ordinary methods, such as family, friends, money, material possessions, work, art, and so forth are not inherently satisfying.

The great secret, if you want to call it that, is that happiness, which we all want, and suffering, which none of us wants, come primarily from the mind, and if Buddhism is about anything, it's about the mind. As Lama Yeshe said,

> When we study Buddhism, we are studying ourselves, the nature of our own minds. Instead of focusing on some supreme being, Buddhism emphasizes more practical matters, such as how to lead our lives, how to integrate our minds, and how to keep our everyday lives peaceful and healthy. In other words, Buddhism always accentuates experiential knowledge-wisdom rather than some dogmatic view. In fact, we don't even consider Buddhism to be a religion in the usual sense of the term. From the lamas' point of view, Buddhist teachings are more in the realm of philosophy, science, or psychology.

He also pointed out that,

> In Buddhism, we're not that interested in talking about the Buddha himself. Nor was he. Lord Buddha wasn't interested in people believing in him, so to this day Buddhism has never encouraged its followers simply to believe in the Buddha. We have always been more

> interested in understanding human psychology, the nature of the mind. Thus, Buddhist practitioners always try to understand their own mental attitudes, concepts, perceptions, and consciousness. Those are the things that really matter.

In other words, Buddhism is not about blind faith, scriptural reference or blaming others. It's about mind as the principal source of happiness and suffering, personal responsibility, and compassion for all sentient beings.

When Guru Shakyamuni Buddha taught the four noble truths—the truths of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path—he made it clear that anybody can totally eradicate suffering and, as I mentioned before, countless practitioners since then have accomplished this great feat. These days, many people understand just from hearing or reading teachings that Buddhism offers a better path to happiness that anything they've yet tried, so they start to put the teachings into practice. As they gain experience, they find it works the way it's supposed to, so they have confidence to proceed further along the path.

Used with permission.

1. Lama Yeshe:
Taking the Essence (1982)

Mandala July–December 2016

Born in Tibet, Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935–1984) escaped to India after the Chinese invasion of 1959. He began teaching Westerners in 1965, and, along with Lama Zopa Rinpoche, founded Kopan Monastery in Nepal as well as the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). In 1982, His Holiness the Dalai Lama toured Europe at the invitation of FPMT and others, visiting Spain, France, and Italy. Just after the visit of His Holiness to Italy, Lama Yeshe was interviewed there by Geoff Jukes, the founder of Meridian Trust, *a Buddhist film and video archive.*

Geoff Jukes: Lama, when you started teaching in the West, did you find any particular difficulties in the approach you had to make to teach Western people? Did you find any specific problems there that were not usual in Tibet?

Lama Yeshe: Well, if you mean were the problems when teaching Dharma to Westerners different from those when teaching Easterners, the answer is yes.

First of all, the basic approach has to be different. You can't teach Westerners the way you teach Tibetans. The process has to be slower, and also, Westerners expect something solid, more concrete. For instance, teachings employ a lot of examples, so the ones we use need to be relevant to the Western mind, something from their experience, and any statements we make need to be clean clear and definite, not vague.

Also, when we're teaching Tibetan students we have this system where we quote a lot of scripture, like, "In this text, Nagarjuna said, this, this, this." It's similar to the way Christians teach the Bible, quoting chapter and verse and giving historical references. But if we do quote scripture when teaching Dharma to Westerners, it's mainly for historical purposes, not as concrete statements of fact. That doesn't work for the Western mind.

Therefore we have to come up with a different approach. Of course, we don't change the true nature of the Dharma we're teaching, but the question is how to put it into the Western mind in order to open people's minds into that space. Before giving teachings we have to think that out well: how to get the Dharma into people's brains. So it needs a very sympathetic thought process to decide, "This is how I'm going to present this subject for the Western mind." For me, that takes quite a bit of energy.

Also, we have to experiment a bit to see what works. We definitely can't teach refuge and karma, for example, Tibetan style. Such topics need to be taught more scientifically than philosophically. Karma is an incredibly huge subject and can be taught a hundred different ways. To make it comprehensible we need to relate it to people's everyday life.

For many Westerners, Buddhist philosophy contradicts their worldview. Certain things have nothing to do with their own philosophy; it's a new dream philosophy for them. Until they've

been oriented to Buddhist philosophical understanding, I can't put the reality of karma into their frame of reference. So for me to teach karma to Westerners, I have to go beyond the philosophical frame and try to extract the nuclear essence of the teachings on karma, then figure out how to put that into the Western mind.

So it's not that easy to bring Dharma to the West, especially by teaching in a philosophical way, because Westerners are not oriented to that way of understanding. They know nothing of Buddhist philosophy, so if I begin to talk using Buddhist logic they're going to say, "What ...?" They think Eastern logic has it backwards. Instead of helping them they say, "No, we think this, you say that. You say something exists because of this; we say that's precisely why it does not exist." This is quite a challenge for me.

Also, I try never to have fixed ideas. Each time before I teach I have to think about what kind of people are involved, what's their background—is it religious or nonreligious, scientific or nonscientific, philosophical or what? So I try to get whatever information about them I can and then relate to my audience accordingly. It takes quite a bit of effort.

Still, I feel that Buddhism gives us the kinds of skills we need to deal with human beings. It teaches us to go beyond limited concepts and philosophies. As long as I don't lose the essential aspect of the meaning, I don't care that much about the philosophical structure. It's very important that people who teach Tibetan Buddhism in the West be concerned about the essence, not just the philosophy. Furthermore, when they teach they need to refer to Western philosophy and psychology. In that way their teachings will be very acceptable and their audience will comprehend them more easily. Otherwise, if there's no connection between the teacher's subject and the student's mind, there'll be no way to help the student, to transform the student's mind.

In conclusion, it's more important to convey the essence of Buddhism rather than rigidly sticking to some kind of system. It can be good to follow a structure once students are established, but for beginners, no way. As far as they're concerned, before they encounter the Dharma, it doesn't exist, and you're talking about some Shangri-la with which they're not familiar.

GJ: What then, Lama, would you say is the essence of Buddhism? What would you describe as the essence of Buddhism?

Lama Yeshe: Topics such as the four noble truths, the eightfold path, the three principal aspects of the path, the equilibrium meditation, the four immeasurables, bodhichitta, and emptiness constitute the essence of Buddhism. They are very scientific, understandable, and logical. Nobody can deny the reality of those subjects. They are so practical.

But it's not just a question of explanation. The teachings have to be put into practice. In order to solve the problems Westerners face today, they have to meditate. If we simply present the Dharma as some kind of miracle cure or magic, it's not going to help people; it's not going to help them solve their problems. They have to contemplate the teachings they hear.

The essence of Buddhism is its clean clear presentation of ideas that have universal appeal, beyond culture, and do not contradict other religious philosophies. Both religious and nonreligious people can relate to the essence of Buddhism. That's its beauty—there's no contradiction.

GJ: Do you see, Lama, a form of Buddhism evolving that will be like Western Buddhism in the sense that, when Buddhism first came from India to Tibet it was absorbed into the culture, like in Japan it became Zen Buddhism and in Thailand Theravada Buddhism? Do you see this starting to happen now within the centers that are evolving?

Lama Yeshe: Do you mean is Tibetan Buddhism adapting culturally as it gets more involved in the Western world?

GJ: Yes, do you see it being readily absorbed into this environment in the way that Buddhism from India was absorbed into Tibetan culture?

Lama Yeshe: Yes, I do have something to say on this matter. I tell you, one of my pleasures is that I'm teaching the essence of Buddhism which, on first sight, might seem impossible to put into Western culture. This is one of the things that gives me the greatest pleasure. Why? I truly believe that if somebody understands the essence of the universal teaching *as* the essence and practices that, it's much more powerful than practicing by interpreting the teaching as culture, as part of that person's cultural heritage. That's a sloppy mind that's just looking at the relative conditions. That person's practice then becomes a routine, like a custom.

Therefore I find it very beneficial for the teacher and student to have no expectations of each other. Still, with the way most new students contact the Buddhadharma, I have to accept that they're not going to believe the teachings at first. Then I have to fight them—their wrong conceptions, their mistaken worldview due to their wrong way of thinking, and their wrong views on life, success, and pleasure. I have to bring all these things into the conversation. I say, "You think that way? That's wrong. You should think the right way, which is … this."

So that's the challenge. And that's the way Westerners get a taste of Buddhism and become Buddhist. They *experience* the teachings as correct rather than just believe them to be true. And those new people, those Westerners becoming Buddhist, are very fortunate. They have the inclination to accept Buddhism but they first check out what this Buddhist monk has to say, what Buddhism can offer them. They look into the teachings rather than immediately assume that they're acceptable. So that's the beauty of it.

Westerners becoming Buddhist is something serious. They do it on the basis of a comprehensible wisdom experience, not some cultural upbringing or familial habit. For me, that's a much better way to become Buddhist rather than the cultural acceptance of the sloppy mind: "Buddhism's my home; I can sit back very comfortably."

I don't believe Buddhism should be comfortable. Buddhism likes to shake the darkness of ignorance and craving desire; its purpose is not to give you a comfortable life. So I've always felt that when Westerners find that Buddhism helps them it's because they've experienced its benefits in practice, not because they think Buddhist philosophy contains some good ideas. They don't

follow that kind of reasoning, and I don't like it either. I like that some people have had meditational experiences that have helped them eliminate their confusion and dissatisfaction. That's the way they've become Buddhist, and I truly believe that that's a wonderful way to do so.

I also believe that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha himself made it that way. During his time the whole population was oriented toward Buddhism, so he taught the four noble truths in order to help them actualize the Buddhist path. Similarly, it's very good for Westerners to have a skeptical mind and try things out to see if they're helpful or not in their experience. If they get a good taste, they become Buddhist. I'm very impressed by that. It's a great way to become Buddhist.

With respect to those Western people who have a long experience of Buddhism, who've been taking teachings for ten or twelve years, they've experienced its benefits and found it helpful for their mind, so that's why they've stuck with it, not because they've simply become accustomed to it.

Trying to introduce Tibetan customs into Western society doesn't give a true picture of Buddhism. Customs aren't important. If you take the broad view, you'll see that Buddhism went from India to countries like China, Japan, and Tibet, and wherever it went it took on a different cultural shape. So Tibetan culture can never become the culture of Italy, for example. Also, some students with a taste for Buddhism try to become Tibetan. How can that be possible? It can't. It's a joke. It would be much better if they were to try to become Buddha or Dharma rather than Tibetan! That's more realistic; that *is* possible.

So I'm thinking that in the long run, when Tibetan teachers come here to Italy and the teachings have been established in the Western world, we see the development of Italian Dharma: Italian Buddha, Italian Dharma, Italian Sangha. We get European-style Buddhism. It's not going to be Tibetan-style Buddhism.

With respect to the way to practice, I truly believe that it's not necessary to bring some of the Tibetan rituals to the West. The emphasis should not be on ritual. That's just bringing the culture, isn't it? As I keep saying, the most important thing is to understand Buddhist philosophy, understand the mind, understand the way to approach enlightenment and how to liberate others and ourselves from misery. Those things are the essence; those things are what we have to actualize and live our life by.

However, practices like Buddhist ordination—for example, the five precepts—are not Tibetan customs. Taking precepts has nothing to do with Tibetan culture. Negative is negative and positive is positive no matter where in the world you go. What's essential is to protect our mind from negativity.

So, while the true essence of Buddhism does not emphasize ritual, in certain situations we do employ ritual—for example, to identify ourselves as a transcendent archetype—but in other environments, no, definitely not. The human mind is relative and conditioned. Some people are interested in the revolutionary life; others are more materialistic. People are different. In the West, we think differently. Take Europe, for instance. The Europe of one hundred years ago is gone. If we try to act today the way they did back then, people will think we're crazy. Things are very

different now. It's the same with Tibet. Tibetan culture goes back a long way but there are still gaps. The problem of gaps will always exist, no matter how you try to orient yourself.

So, for that reason, I say that Tibetan teachers, including myself, teaching in the West should not expect their students to behave as Eastern students do. The behavior here is different. But that's not to say that Eastern students are better than Western ones. They're just different. I believe they have the same qualities, the same essence, but their behavior is not the same. So if Tibetan teachers expect Westerners to behave as Tibetans do, they're in for a shock. So, different relationship, same essence.

And from the other side, while Western people are not oriented to Eastern philosophy and don't know the framework of Eastern religions, still, the essence can touch their hearts and they can become Buddhist in the right way.

If you approach Buddhism as a cultural phenomenon or as a people's culture, you won't take the essence. You'll just take the outer covering, the exterior. There's no essence there. Many countries take their national religion as a national custom. That's a bad thing. As a result, they don't get any answers from their religion because they don't get the essence.

Therefore, I think Buddhism coming to the West is a very good thing. It's much needed; people are suffering a lot. Western people's mental suffering is as great as it is because physically they are very comfortable, and what remains is the monkey mind. When people are physically comfortable their monkey mind gets restless, looking for something else to do. So in order to pacify this monkey mind, this boiling water mind, we need the powerful understanding that only meditation can bring. We need the nuclear energy of meditation.

One thing I've observed in the West is that the environment is overwhelmingly strong, while people's minds are very sensitive, and this combination creates many problems we see in Western life. Life in the West is so sensitive, so strong, and so concrete that Western ego conflict is very serious, very powerful. In other words, in a Western environment—and I'm making a generalization here—desire is much more powerful than it is in the third world. Anyway, in the third world there aren't so many desirable objects. I'm joking! That's probably not true.

But what I mean is that in the West, objects of desire are set up in such a way that the ego is strongly provoked. In order to eliminate ego and desire and the problems they create, we need a powerful antidote. Cultural games are not enough to do this. Playing cymbals is not enough. In order to solve problems we need powerful meditation, powerful thinking.

Therefore, if you're only oriented toward Tibetan ritual you can't solve problems because its instruments aren't that powerful when played in the West. That's my point: in a Western environment, we need strong meditation. And that's why I think that Buddhism is helpful for Western people. Buddhism explains the nature of the explosion of delusion the twentieth century has brought, and Buddhist meditation helps us understand and overcome the problems this has caused. And this is not just my idea. This is Western people's experience.

This interview was excerpted by Mandala *from the* Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive *video* Bringing Dharma to the West, Part 1: How We Started Teaching Westerners. *The entire interview may be found on video at* Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

2. Geshe Lhundub Sopa: Transmitting 'Gold'

Mandala November 1996

Geshe Lhundub Sopa was born in 1923 in Tibet and fled to India in 1959. He completed his philosophical studies in the Tibetan refugee camps in India, where he was awarded the lharampa geshe degree. Geshe Sopa taught at the University of Wisconsin from 1967 to 1997, and was the abbot of the Deer Park Buddhist Center near Madison, Wisconsin, US. He hosted the first Kalachakra offered by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the US, and co-authored several books, including Cutting Through Appearances: Practice And Theory of Tibetan Buddhism, Steps on the Path to Enlightenment: A Commentary on Tsongkhapa's Lamrim Chenmo, *and* Peacock in the Poison Grove: Two Buddhist Texts on Training the Mind. *He passed away in 2014.*

Geshe Sopa spoke with Ven. Elly van der Pas, Kalleen Mortensen, Mary Bennett, and Carl Yoder.

Mandala: Please tell us how you came to America.

Geshe Sopa: In 1962, I was chosen to go to America. I think His Holiness had been requested by Geshe Wangyal who had a monastery in New Jersey. I was chosen to go with three young lamas from the Young Lamas Home School in New Delhi. Geshe Wangyal had a grant for three of these young lamas to come to America to learn English. So I was chosen by His Holiness to go with them to teach them Buddhism. One of the lamas, Kamlung Rinpoche, was my student in Tibet and I had lived with him in India. The others were Sharpa Tulku and Lama Kunga, a Sakyapa. Kamlung Rinpoche and Sherpa Tulku had attended Sera.

So I went to New Jersey in 1963. It was for four years and after 1966 I had to return. But then in 1965 or 1966, Geshe Wangyal requested His Holiness to allow me and Lama Kunga to stay as they needed the monastery in New Jersey to stay open. So I stayed there.

After a couple of years, I heard of a Wisconsin professor who was seeking a native Tibetan scholar for the study of the Tibetan language. He was Professor Richard Robinson, the chairman of Buddhist Studies at the University of Wisconsin. He felt it was most crucial to find someone. A lot of Buddhist texts had been lost in Sanskrit when the Muslims conquered India, as you know. All of the Indian monasteries were destroyed and many texts were lost. But all of the scriptures and commentaries had been translated into Tibetan. Therefore, the Tibetan language is most crucial.

Professor Robinson heard I was in New Jersey, so he came to ask me to come to Wisconsin University. I thought, how can I go there? I can't teach because of my English. But he was very, very insistent, saying I should come. He said I could learn a little English and he could learn a little Tibetan and together we could teach a class. He was very, very strong in urging me.

I went to Wisconsin one year, then another year, then for a third year. Later, I moved there.

During that time, there was a lot of interest in the teachings. It was during the Vietnam War and there were a lot of hippies, a lot of young who were interested in studying. They slowly learned of me after they traveled in Nepal and India. As a result, I soon had quite a number of students around my house and studying at the university. Some of them are now professors. From the beginning, the studies got stronger, continued to develop. I also had private students. After I was teaching for some time, the group wanted to form a society, so we established the Ganden Mahayana Center; [later] its name was changed to Deer Park Center.

Mandala: What are your virtuous wishes particularly with regard to the flourishing of Buddhism in the West?

Geshe Sopa: I have all kinds of wishes (laughs). You can't explain all of your wishes (laughs). We are in this period of degenerating times, and in general Buddhism is disappearing. Starting from its origins in India, it has gone outward, from southern India to Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, all those areas. Also, Mahayana Buddhism has gone to Nepal, Tibet, China, and Japan. For centuries Tibetan Buddhism developed purely, with strong scholarship and yogic practice. It had strong influence.

Until 1959, Tibet was at a high point of its development and then suddenly it collapsed. At that time, some were able to escape. His Holiness and many of the teachers and lamas were able to get out. All the Buddhist scriptures, the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*, had earlier been sent to America and England as gifts by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

We Tibetans call his Holiness *Yishin Norbu*, which means the Wish-Granting Jewel. Tibetans have for a long time considered him as Avalokiteshvara, who manifested for the Tibetan people. For me, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama is the most precious. Once he got out, along with other Tibetan monks, he was there mainly to preserve Buddhist teachings. He is the jewel of the world for everybody. He especially re-established the three big monasteries, Sera, Drepung, and Ganden, and tried to start the learning tradition in the monasteries. First starting with Buxa, and then continued with help from [Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal] Nehru and the Indian government. They did a marvelous job for the Tibetans. His Holiness established the three main centers, also Nyingma, Sakya, and Kagyu centers. Everywhere religion was strongly preserved and subsequently it spread to Westerners and over the whole world, to all people who were interested in learning.

In the last few years, I have visited different places and almost everywhere there are Tibetan Buddhist centers. People are interested so much in this teaching and practice that they themselves are dedicated to bringing special teachers from India to centers in Europe, Canada, the US, Asia, Australia, South America. This way of spreading the teachings is not an attempt to convert people in the world; we don't do that. But people are particularly interested in the teaching, so we teach, and that is the way it should be. The desire to have this arises from people's heart, because everybody wants to have peace and happiness, and nobody wants misery or suffering. The essence of the Buddha's teaching is individual liberation, freedom, and worldwide compassion and love. This is the heart of the Tibetan culture, and now it is not just kept in one small country but has gone everywhere.

While there are many valuable scriptures and commentaries, most are not available in English. Many of them, however, are beginning to be translated. That is valuable because people can begin to read these scriptures themselves, can have the choice to do their own studying. This is happening. First the student is studying, reading, then is ready for more. With a taste of teachings, they want to go deeper. Nobody wants to proceed without knowing much, with only blind faith.

The source for the teaching is these translations. It will happen slowly but everything will be translated eventually. That, in general, is my wish. There are so many problems in the world: misery, suffering, sickness, poverty, and the environment of physical and mental destruction. The most essential help is in the teachings, the mental training. People in the world will develop peaceful minds, knowledge, wisdom, and then that excellent personality will spread everywhere. This will be the cause of peace.

Buddhist teachings, all spiritual teachings, are like medicine for the sickness of the world. That is what Buddhism is saying. Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacaryavatara* says that in the world all the fear, misery, suffering, all these problems, arise from egotistic view, selfishness, wanting for oneself, one's own happiness. But having compassion, and the wish for happiness for others rather than just for selfish purposes, will create so much happiness.

So what is the best medicine? There are temporary cures, herbs, medicine, but the only permanent real medicine that leads to freedom from sickness and misery is the spiritual teaching, Dharma. Dharma is the medicine, the cure that brings peace and happiness. There are many different religions and every spiritual teaching is supposed to lead to peace, happiness, and solving problems. Especially our Buddhist teachings exist mainly for that purpose. So I wish that spiritual teaching continues strongly and spreads everywhere, to every part of the world. In that way all people can have this medicine. Okay?

In the dedication chapter in *Bodhisattvacaryavatara*, Shantideva prays that the Dharma remain in the world as long as samsara is there. And it will remain a long time with the assistance of certain kinds of wealth. Dharma centers need financial help; wealth along with honor and respect. With that, these teachings may remain as long as samsara remains. That this teaching may remain with wealth and respect is one of his dedications. So with that, I think the worldwide happiness would be very excellent.

This is my wish. But there are selfish wishes too (laughs). Those I won't tell you (laughs).

Mandala: For beginners or anyone studying Buddhism, what course of study is the most valuable?

Geshe Sopa: I think the most valuable at the beginning is the summary of the essence of the whole Buddhist teaching from the beginning to the end, the lamrim. Become familiar with that before taking each topic one by one. Especially for people who are interested in all of the Buddha's vast teachings. There are many lamrims: small, intermediate, and more advanced texts. They serve as a manual of Buddhism, an overview.

It is much easier to get interested in some deep scripture, but first you must learn how to practice, and how to live your own life. For this, studying lamrim is good. For example if you plan to visit

another country, you need a map, a manual. It will tell you how many miles away is the city or town you are interested in. Then you go there, and every detail of how you got there and what you will be seeing, all of it is in the manual. This is what the lamrim is in the Buddhist realm.

Mandala: Can you say something about tantra coming to the West and, for those who study Buddhism, what approach is best to take?

Geshe Sopa: Tantric teaching is the highest level of teaching and the most secret teaching. It requires so much preparation. To receive tantric teaching you require the three preliminaries: the special thought of renunciation; bodhichitta, special universal love and compassion based on special spontaneous mind of altruism; and the viewpoint of wisdom that understands reality or truth, shunyata. These three are called the three principal aspects of the path, the door to any kind of tantra.

The main meditation is the understanding of these three dominant aspects. Without these, the high tantric rituals and practices—powers, the wrathful deities, union with consort—can be misunderstood. On the surface it could look like you can kill others, steal from others, and have sexual enjoyment.

People just grab tantric teachings without developing the three preliminaries. They may get some kind of result, but the result will not be good. A black magical result may arise and, instead of getting a high result, the practitioner will create the cause for a lower rebirth by treating others badly and themselves too. Therefore tantra is a dangerous area.

People should first examine, study, and learn mainly lamrim. Lamrim provides the three principal aspects, as I mentioned. When you have them, your tantric practice will be good. But a lot of people are interested just in the results, rather than the cause. That is not good. But to have an interest in learning, studying, in order to know what is proper and what is the cause, that is good. The method side is the most important.

Jumping around too much is not good. If you want to fly somewhere in an airplane without learning how to fly, or even without knowing how to get to the airport, and you take the machine and try, you will be destroyed. You and your passengers are in a dangerous situation. So that is the analogy.

Mandala: When you first came to America, were there a few Americans who were Buddhists?

There were some Buddhists, mainly Japanese Zen, and a few Chinese Buddhists. But Tibetan Buddhism was almost unknown. People had heard about Tibetan Buddhism in a negative way; the essence was not known, nobody was teaching it. And some thought Tibet a backward country closed to Westerners: Shangri-la, something exotic.

This is slowly changing now that Tibetans are in India, and because of the many places in the West like Lama Yeshe's and Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's centers. The essence is being slowly discovered by Westerners. In the last several years, everywhere I've been in Europe and South America there are centers popping up like flowers. People are very, very enthusiastic and

sympathetic. They really want to learn, want to do practice, and not just look on as anthropologists, but to study the real essence of the teaching. Geshes and lamas have been visiting, teaching the essence of lamrim and giving tantric initiations.

People in the world are intelligent. When they really become involved—looking, examining, analyzing—everybody has the ability to know, to understand. Buddhist teachings are for all human society, not only for Tibetans. They are for everybody.

Mandala: What do you think is important for the future of Buddhism in the West?

Geshe Sopa: I think the future is that the best teachers continue to teach and we have a good system and good centers, and people go there. Let the best part spread everywhere, but not the part mixed with the worldly, the Eight Worldly Goals: wealth, fame, praise, all these worldly things. If you utilize the teachings of Buddhism as the way to get wealth, the religion becomes evil. That is a disservice to pure Buddhist teachings and, also, it will be a disservice to the public.

The main thing is for people to have interest, to investigate, to open their minds. Once people have opened their minds, they have wisdom. People have special wisdom and intelligence in the West. People just don't want to go merely on blind faith; they want to know, to check scientifically and logically: the source, what, how, where. And Tibetan Buddhism is logical and scientific. It explains so many teachings: there are so many commentaries, sub-commentaries, all taught by scholars, monks, and lamas who have trained for years.

So therefore that tradition, when built in a solid way, will spread and stay long in the West. It will not easily disappear. There are many people who are interested and that way, more and more will learn the teachings; more and more people will continue. I don't believe the whole of the West will come under the power of Buddhism. But it will go everywhere.

So I'm very happy that a lot of people are interested in the Buddhadharma and are establishing centers and foundations, groups and societies. These will greatly benefit people. But they should not mix up everything; they should try and present the pure essence of the teachings.

The most important and essential thing now is that the scriptures, commentaries, the real heart of the philosophy, are being put into English. Even though there are Tibetan scholars, having to translate the teachings makes it difficult. There are still language and communication barriers, but scholarship in Buddhism in the West is getting better, and I think this will go on.

Inevitably, with so much scholarship in the West, the pure philosophy will be mixed with other thoughts. This will happen, it is to be expected. But people will contemplate and publish ideas and write reviews, and in this way corrections can be made, making scholarship better and better. It is like finding gold. You need to analyze again and again, you need to purify it. In that way, the essential teachings can slowly be developed. Then you will have pure gold.

3. Yangsi Rinpoche: Lamrim in the West

Mandala December 2003–January 2004

Yangsi Rinpoche was born in born in Nepal in 1968. He was recognized as the reincarnation of Geshe Ngawang Gendun, a renowned scholar and practitioner from Western Tibet, at the age of six. Rinpoche trained in the traditional monastic system and in 1995 graduated with the degree of geshe lharampa from Sera Je Monastery in South India. He then completed his studies at Gyume Tantric College. Rinpoche is the president of FPMT-affiliate Maitripa College as well as the spiritual director of Ganden Shedrup Ling Buddhist Center in San Juan, Puerto Rico, US. He is the author of Practicing the Path: A Commentary on the Lamrim Chenmo.

Mandala: Do we need specific instructions to meditate on the lamrim, the graduated path to enlightenment?

Rinpoche: Of course. In the lamrim there are several traditions of methods to explain the texts. The first is the direct explanation, the traditional method in our system, in which the lama explains the entire lamrim point by point according to the outline. This elicits a very clear intellectual understanding of the lamrim in the mind of the student. You can begin your meditation with this. However, on that basis it is then best to receive instruction based on the second, third, and fourth traditions.

The second is the method in which the teacher points out the faults and mistakes in the mind of the disciple, and teaches their antidotes.

The third is the instructions on meditation based on the teacher's own experience of meditation.

The fourth method is the gradual method, in which the student is given specific instructions on how to meditate on each of the topics progressively. Usually, these instructions will be given to the student based on his or her own level of mind and understanding. Each topic is taught successively, and a new topic will not be taught until signs of realizations of the first are experienced.

Usually in the West we first receive the general instructions on the lamrim from a lama in teachings in a center and so forth. It is then the responsibility of the student to familiarize him- or herself with those instructions, and then request specific instructions on meditation for the topics.

The Middle Length Lamrim by Lama Tsongkhapa is organized more from the point of view of meditation instruction than *Lamrim Chenmo*, also by Lama Tsongkhapa, which presents a more philosophical approach. However, all of these instructions can be found within *Lamrim Chenmo* as well. The eight lamrim texts, including *The Blissful Path* and *The Quick Path* by the Panchen Lamas, are also organized more from the point of view of meditation instruction.

Mandala: What other guidance can you give us, perhaps from your own personal experience?

Rinpoche: In the monastery we would debate for an hour, recite the 21 Taras prayers, the *Heart Sutra*, lineage prayers, and so forth, in order to accumulate merit for the purpose of helping our studying, hearing, and contemplating to become more effective for our internal growth. Therefore, I would suggest that Westerners practice being really patient in setting their motivation in everything they do, for example in their working lives, so that they are accumulating merit every minute of the day. Every thought and action, if it is done with a good heart, can help us to accumulate merit.

Achieving realization demands of us inner feeling and a clear view. Without those two together it is impossible to follow the three principles of the path—renunciation, bodhichitta, and emptiness—to achieve the goal.

The lamrim *is* the path, but it is important to understand what is behind it. *Lamrim Chenmo* might look like a totally philosophical text but its real value lies in what is beneath it, in its source. What is that source? It is the essence of Lama Atisha's understanding and realization of the path to enlightenment. It is also the essence of the understanding and realization of the Dharma king of the three realms—Lama Tsongkhapa—who wrote this extensive commentary to Lama Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.

By practicing a most precious teaching such the lamrim, the heart of the entire Buddhadharma, it is possible to achieve liberation from samsara. But without the lamrim, even tantric practice cannot become Dharma, and there is the danger that it may become a cause of rebirth in the lower realms of the hell beings, hungry ghosts, or animals.

Mandala: Why did you write a commentary on *Lamrim Chenmo*?

Rinpoche: My motivation in writing the book was first to do what Lama Zopa Rinpoche asked of me. By agreeing, I felt I would be able to reach more people. That was my next strong motivation—to make a connection between the readers and what is really behind *Lamrim Chenmo*. Westerners have a thirst for learning and I believe they will readily go to the source.

4. Ven. Antonio Satta: Mindfulness-Awareness Meditation

Mandala October–November 2006

FPMT registered teacher Ven. Antonio Satta was born in Italy in 1956 and ordained in 1979. In 1981, he trained in Sri Lanka, living at a meditation center founded by Mahasi Sayadaw. He then spent years at Tharpa Choeling monastery in Switzerland (now Rabten Choeling) with Geshe Rabten, undertaking a classical Tibetan course of study which emphasized intellectual analysis and debate. In recent years, Ven. Antonio has concentrated on introducing Dharma students to the practice of mindfulness-awareness meditation, leading retreats all over the world.

Martin Boudin interviewed Ven. Antonio in Bodhgaya, India for Mandala.

Mandala: The vipassana type of retreat is not normally associated with the Tibetan tradition. How did this retreat evolve?

Ven. Antonio: This retreat is based on classic vipassana. But it also has Mahayana elements—some so-called basic Mahamudra meditation and a strong emphasis on the practice of acceptance as taught in the mind training (*lojong*) texts. And it is taught in a Mahayana context. The real emphasis is on understanding the "three marks of life": that it is unsatisfactory, impermanent, and selfless. In that sense, it is definitely classic vipassana.

It seems to me that we can talk of two types of confusion: intellectual and emotional. Intellectual confusion is eliminated through study, emotional confusion with mindfulness-awareness. The approach, particularly in our tradition, is to eliminate the intellectual confusion. But the Western students who approach the Dharma are so overwhelmed by emotional confusion! Based on my own experience with vipassana, it seemed that a simple and uncomplicated approach would help eliminate emotional confusion.

Mandala: You have spoken about the conceptual approach not being as suitable to the Western mind because we are already so full of concepts.

Ven. Antonio: It depends what you mean by "conceptual approach" and to what branch of the practice you are referring. We are obviously talking about meditation and not study; in order to study we definitely need to think, to use concepts. It is in the context of meditation that there is a debate, a discussion about whether concepts are useful or not.

If by meditation we are referring to a practice where one tries to generate a certain feeling and then dwells on it and becomes familiar with it, then of course one would need a certain thought process. This is what we mostly do when we meditate on the lamrim.

If, on the other hand, we are referring to a practice where one does not try to create anything, but looks at things *as they are*, then we don't need concepts. In that case, concepts would be more of a hindrance.

But there is a big misunderstanding (or not understanding!) with regard to no-concepts in meditation. "No-concepts" does not mean not thinking, in the sense "do not think!" "No-concepts" here means silently observing what is taking place.

If we take anger, for example, do we need to conceptualize anger when it is happening? When something is taking place, do we need to think about it in order to understand what is going on? Do we need to conceptualize pain to know that it is pain? "Hmm, is that pain? Or something else …?"

In mindfulness-awareness meditation, understanding has a very different meaning. It's not the understanding of acquiring knowledge, but simply seeing clearly, as it is, with bare attention. Bare attention means to let the experience talk for itself without interruption from inner complaints and lamentation—conceptualizations.

Rather, we listen or observe what it is trying to say. And when, for example, we let anger be anger—without generating the strong wish not to be angry, while anger is taking place—we'll see what anger is trying to tell us: "I am just passing by. I won't stay, even if you cover me with gold." Because that is its nature: impermanent, transient. The only way to see-feel this truth is with the mindfulness of bare attention, silently observing with no conceptual interference.

And we should not make the big mistake of thinking, "I know anger is impermanent, transient, etc., etc." It's not so obvious!

We don't really know because we never see it *as it is*. We always feed it with "I don't want to be angry!" Applying Shantideva's verses [on patience] while being angry is using the antidote—thinking—at the wrong time. This is obviously the opposite to silently seeing anger going.

In the very moment during which something like anger is taking place, the wish to get rid of it or the *not wanting* to be angry nourishes the anger as much as wanting to be angry. We haven't understood yet that anger wants to go as much as we do. Actually, even more! This is understood only when we observe it silently while it is taking place, without interrupting it.

Anger doesn't like that.

This is how one would look at the disturbing emotions with the discipline of non-conceptualization. This is what I mean by a non-conceptual approach.

Mandala: How is developing mindfulness usually taught in the Tibetan tradition?

Ven. Antonio: The question is not where is it taught, but how it is practiced. In the Theravada tradition, for example, there are monasteries and meditation centers where people train together in the practice of cultivating mindfulness. In our [Tibetan] tradition, it seems to me that it is up to the individual to pursue this type of training. The four foundations of mindfulness are taught by lamas but not in the context of a retreat. Normally it is a course with hardly any meditation!

It is one thing to study the four objects of mindfulness: the condition of body, feelings, consciousness, and dharmas. It is another thing to contemplate them, not conceptually, but with a silent investigation.

It is not that we don't hear about mindfulness, but we don't see people doing it. There is not collective training as there is collective study. Without sitting and practicing together, the cultivation and development of mindfulness is extremely difficult as it needs lots of inspiration.

It is easy to sit for hours reciting prayers, chanting, upper body swinging; but sitting still and watching one's mind is very difficult. Only by sitting and training together can one generate the courage needed to follow this discipline. And if we don't begin to train—not individually but collectively—in the practice of mindfulness-awareness right from the very beginning, then when we eventually start a serious retreat, we'll realize that we can't even sit.

What is missing, and probably not understood, is that mindfulness has to be practiced collectively.

Mandala: What has been the reaction to you teaching this practice?

Ven. Antonio: Do my teachers approve of what I am teaching? The only one with whom I have discussed it a bit is Lama Zopa Rinpoche. I started to explain what I was doing and he said, "That's good." Lama Zopa Rinpoche is very concerned that the practice of mindfulness is used by many in the West as a method to just feel good and peaceful, with not much interest in the actual practice of Buddhism. I totally agree with Rinpoche.

Mindfulness in Buddhism refers to "right mindfulness," the seventh of the eightfold path, not just mindfulness. The term "right" is not as in right versus wrong. Rather, it means seeing things as they are: unsatisfactory, impermanent, and selfless; "right" in that sense.

When we begin to see things in the right way, we begin to understand existence, life, our self, the Dharma. This is not done by just conceptualizing as we normally do, but by observing—because life *is* unsatisfactory, impermanent, selfless! It is not an opinion; it is just like that. This is the type of mindfulness I teach. As for the reaction to me teaching this practice, it's been very positive.

Mandala: To you, what is the essence of Buddhism?

Ven. Antonio: The essence has to be something that we touch right from the very beginning. The essence has to be what is essential for us. And what is that? *Sila*—morality/discipline. That's what brings the immediate result of mental peace. Sila, which means "cool," is that which cools passions: confusion, craving desire, and anger, the so-called three fires or three poisons. Sila is our best weapon to fight unhappiness. Sila has already made the disturbing concepts kneel down by the time emptiness arrives. Then emptiness simply cuts off their heads.

For us, morality/discipline is the real essence of Buddhism. Even next to emptiness and bodhichitta, I think it can still be considered the real essence, because without it there cannot be any realizations. One may argue that emptiness is the real essence, or in the Mahayana,

bodhichitta. But without cooling our confusion first with the water of sila (as the Buddha put it), will bodhichitta ever be generated? Will emptiness ever be realized?

When we are very happy, we are not interested in the practice. Neither are we interested when we are unhappy. Sila is what cools these two extremes, making the mind neither happy nor unhappy, and thus creating the condition to begin to practice. The question is not what text to study first but what practice to first adopt. If we phrase it like that, the answer is clearly sila: morality/ discipline. That is the essence for us.

5. Dr. Robert Thurman: Engaged Realism

Mandala October–November 2006

Dr. Robert A. F. Thurman, born in New York City, US, in 1941, is a long-time student of Tibetan Buddhism. He first saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1962, and after learning Tibetan and studying Dharma he became the first American to be ordained by His Holiness. He later received a Ph.D. from Harvard University, and currently is the Jey Tsong Khapa Chair in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies at Columbia University in New York. He also is the co-founder and president of Tibet House US and has written, edited, and translated many books on Tibetan Buddhism.

Thurman spoke with John Malkin, a journalist, musician, and social change activist.

Mandala: I have heard His Holiness the Dalai Lama say that while the West has been exploring outer space and material science, Tibetans have been exploring inner space and developing an inner science. Tell me about Tibet's laboratory of inner science and your first encounter with the inner revolution in Tibet.

Thurman: My first encounter was purely philosophical. I was not seeking religion because I was defining religion the way we do now in the West, as a matter of faith. I was not interested in faith because it was presented as something irrational. I felt that if people believe things without good reason, then they might luck out and it may be a good thing that they believe, but then they were also in danger of being trapped, seduced, or confused into believing bad things. They would have no reason in either case. Unfortunately, the authoritarian personality that underlies the fascist movements that caused so much trouble in the last century arose in people who had a mindset of believing things without a good reason.

In Tibet, I encountered a philosophy that is an inner science about how to understand yourself and how to understand the world. It was based in using your critical faculty and your doubt and meditating on that and developing better, stronger concentration to doubt with and to reason with.

I define Buddhism nowadays as "Engaged Realism." Buddhism enables one to pull aside the blinds and delusions and traditional myths and see reality as it is and see the reality of one's self as it is. And the more realistic one becomes about reality, the more one realizes that one has the energy and one has the situation of being happy. Even death does not disturb one's happiness in that case, because one has a continuing energy of love and bliss, compassion and wisdom, in whatever body.

Tibet was very backwards and very violent until about thirteen hundred years ago. It was a violent, conquest-oriented place, actually. They had big dynasties and empires and harassed their neighbors and looted and pillaged and behaved just like we do now. This movement of inner revolution and nonviolence sprang up most powerfully in India, which is where the Buddha chose to be reborn in this cycle of history. It was a society that centralized enlightenment and made that the highest aim.

After adopting Buddhism, the Tibetans did another marvelous thing: they went out and interacted with the Mongolians. The Mongolians were world conquerors, controlling the largest empire in history. The Tibetans went among the Mongolians and they taught them that it was more blissful, satisfying, and realistic to conquer yourself than others. The Mongolians began to adopt that demilitarized lifestyle and after about the 17th or 18th century, they became very peaceful. But then both Mongolia and Tibet went under in the 20th century, when global machoism, in the form of imperialism, finally reached Central Asia. That resulted in the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans and many of the Mongolian nations being in the situation where they are now.

Mandala: You have had a lengthy and close friendship with the Dalai Lama. Tell me a little about that.

Thurman: He is a constant inspiration and he becomes greater and greater year by year. He was just in San Francisco having a great dialogue with the worldwide and American Muslim community. It was terrific. I hope he has a long life. I wish that more people would learn about him and read his autobiography, *Freedom in Exile*, and his *Art of Happiness*. I wish that the Chinese government would let the Chinese people have access to him and let him teach them. That would enhance their government, not harm it.

Mandala: I am very interested in the relationship between inner transformation and social revolution. You have written much about this and what you call, "the politics of enlightenment." I notice that in 1958 you made an attempt to join Fidel Castro's Cuban guerilla army. You were also the first Westerner to become a Tibetan Buddhist monk. Tell me about the relationship between inner revolution and social revolution.

Thurman: My attempt at age seventeen with a Mexican friend to join Fidel Castro's army was very low-key. We were simply rejected by recruiters in Miami Beach. We were reading Spanish poetry at the time and we read Castro's poems and we thought that liberation was the way to go. The reality of it never really happened, so I don't take much credit for being what I would call a "hot revolutionary."

Subsequently, I was looking to understand things better and I was looking to understand these realms philosophically and I then discovered Buddhism through the Tibetans. By discovering Buddhism I found a revolution in consciousness, which I feel is the most important of the revolutions. But it is a cool revolution that unfortunately takes a long time. It goes from generation to generation. And we are now getting into this time in history when it needs to come to some kind of positive conclusion. It is a very confusing time where it looks like everything is going totally wrong, as if we are on the brink of doomsday. But underneath that, in awareness, there may be seeds or even flowerings of a new way of being on the planet.

I actually think that the takeover by the military junta that we have experienced in the last five years in the US—and we continue to experience—is a sign of a kind of desperation of the old way of going about change in the militaristic violent way. These days what I would say about the relationship between inner change and social change is that inner change takes priority and is the

most important thing. Through education, this inner change can become a mass movement, as it has in many other countries.

Mandala: In *Inner Revolution* you write, "The Buddha's enlightenment movement sought from the beginning to take power from the ruling bodies and return it to the individual." Do the spiritual revolution of Buddhism and compassion-based anarchism go together, with both based in direct experience and direct participation along with self-reliance and individual responsibility?

Thurman: Yes, somewhat they go together. The problem with nonviolent anarchism is when some local people run into some violent predators of some kind and then the question arises of how to respond to them with no central protection of any kind. Theoretically, in what Buddhists call a "pure land," where everyone is enlightened, then of course that would be a nonviolent anarchism in the sense that there would be no need for any kind of protection because there would be no violent people.

There are such universes where this exists, actually, according to the different planes in this universe which are called "buddhalands." *Buddha-kshetras*. I call them "*buddhaverses*." That is a wonderful thing to strive for and I am sure that is what you mean by spirituality and anarchism. I agree with you that the ideal would be where there would be no need for any kind of protection. Everybody would naturally restrain any negative impulses and there would be a universal nonviolent anarchism. That would be ideal!

Mandala: You write in *Inner Revolution* that "democracy is unwieldy because in it everyone is king" and that "Buddha, as a revolutionary, shifted the social ethos from collectivism to individualism." You have described how collectivism often means the suppressing of everyone's self-interest and that this leads to authoritarianism. When every individual is looking out for the highest good of everyone else, then *that* is what will bring about a peaceful community of people.

Thurman: The idea of the individual looking out for the highest good of everyone else is the attainment of the flowering of the individual. The individuals who are not yet capable of that should bring about a flowering in themselves so that they are not forcing themselves to be altruistic in the way of a martyr. A truly individualistic society creates a healthy collective. In *Star Trek* there was an on-going argument between Spock and Kirk about whether it was "all for the one" or "one for the all." We have to make sure that altruism and the idea of collectivism and "one for the all" must be voluntary.

Mandala: In speaking about individualism, you just mentioned *Star Trek*. I have noticed in the past that you have an interest in science fiction.

Thurman: Yes. I love science fiction! (Laughs) I am a big fan of sci-fi. Unfortunately, I am so busy that I don't get to enjoy it enough and I have fallen behind on who are the greatest current sci-fi writers. *Star Trek* is gone, sadly. What we have instead is *Star Gate*, which is the Pentagon taking over *Star Trek* (laughs). This is unfortunate. There are still some imaginative elements in it, but the Pentagon runs the show.

Mandala: I am guessing that maybe what is exciting for you about science fiction is the element of imagination. I have heard you speak about how important imagination is.

Thurman: Absolutely. For an unenlightened person, such as myself, the first task actually is to *imagine* being enlightened. We must imagine what enlightenment might be like. It is similar for an unhappy person; the first step is to imagine what it might be like to be happy. Once you imagine what it might be like, especially if you can imagine it in a realistic way where you can conceive of yourself as becoming either happy or enlightened—which are in a way the same thing—then that gives you the inspiration, energy, and creativity to seek enlightenment.

One of the problems that we have in the West today is that we have a triumphant self-image. We think that we are the greatest society that ever has existed on the planet! And we repress the fact of our having committed genocide on many other people. We are brainwashed into a version of history where it is impossible for the good to be powerful. Therefore we become afraid and violent. We have been seduced into thinking that a violent revolutionary program or a violent military program will lead to peace and the good life. And it has never done so. Violence always breeds more violence. Buddha and Jesus said this. Even Mohammed said this when Mohammed was not defending himself. They all said this and we don't listen.

Mandala: I would like to hear your thoughts about the way that Buddhism has come to the West. I find it interesting to recall one context in which Buddhism has come to the United States: An influx of Buddhist teachers from Japan came to the US just after the US government bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh came to the US after his country was being bombed by the US, and Tibetan teachers came to the West after the Chinese invaded Tibet.

Thurman: Well, it happened much earlier than that, actually. There was the great religious congress in Chicago in 1893. That was when Buddhism and Hinduism began to be more known here. And even further back there was the transcendentalist movement with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman—these kinds of people were already bringing in Buddhist ideas. The great British translator, Sir William Jones, back at the time of the founding of America, brought Sanskrit writings from India. He was well known to Benjamin Franklin and people like that.

The latest wave has been the post-World War II wave. It was the break-up of imperialism, in the sense of the European empires. They fragmented and different cultures began to know about each other. Buddhist teachers began to come here as refugees in various ways.

With respect to the US wars on Vietnam and Korea, Americans began to realize that militarism was not the most beneficial thing. A dawning of an enlightenment happened here in the 1960s—people began to become more aware of the civil rights movement, the genocide of native Americans, the genocide of African-Americans, and the continued slavery of people in indirect ways, the ghettoization of them and so on—we are still fighting that struggle! There has been a reactionary movement, a kind of desperate rear-guard action against this heightened awareness of women, of people of other races and cultures, and of the complete asininities of militarism, actually!

As far as Buddhism being here in the US, I think that it is misunderstood if it is just thought of as some sort of religious counter-missionarization of America. The real way that Buddhism is being helpful in America is without being Buddhism. It is offering itself as psychology, offering itself as holistic medicine, offering itself as education.

I really respect the Dalai Lama, who has been saying from the very beginning, "This is a time in history now when we must give up the idea of converting each other. We can give up the idea that our ideology is superior to someone else's." Ideological and religious chauvinism is too dangerous in the modern world. The movement of Buddhism here is really the movement of an education movement, an ethical movement, a scientific movement, and only peripherally, really, a religious movement.

Mandala: I am interested in the dialogue that has been happening between Western scientists and Buddhists like yourself and the Dalai Lama.

Thurman: The dogma of materialism is almost like a religiously fanatical position for most scientists. They embrace scientific materialism—or what we could call scientism—and they are being attacked by religious fundamentalists in the form of creationism or intelligent design. And they rightly resist being taken over again by a new inquisition or a new theocracy.

Quantum physicists have discovered that you can't know what matter is with any sort of fixed certainty, in a dogmatic, absolutist way. And yet most of the scientists, biologists, and others are hiding from these discoveries of quantum physics and continue pretending that *they* are going to control the genes, and they are going to control the molecules. Never mind that that they don't even know what the subatomic energies that make up the atoms and the molecules are! What excites me most is the dialogue in which Western scientists are beginning to look at the idea of former and future lives; what they call reincarnation and we call rebirth. It is the idea of the continuity of the individual, life after life.

On the immediate level, there has also been a medical dialogue where the healing of mental problems can be done more by the mind. The mind can heal the mind better than drugs can heal the mind. Although drugs can sometimes be useful—I am not saying that they are not. I am concerned about the dogma of materialism when it leads to relying exclusively on drugs.

Mandala: You have written that "militarism and monasticism are mirror opposites." You have also said that there is not quite yet a Buddhism that has flowered in the United States because there is not yet a monastic Sangha in America.

Thurman: I have said that in the past, but this is changing. There is a Sravasti Abbey in eastern Washington State, formed by a very enlightened Tibetan Buddhist nun, Thubten Chodron, who has been thirty years in the business, so to speak. They are beginning to form a real Sangha there. There is Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia, founded by Pema Chödrön. There are some monasteries in the Catskills. There are the beginnings of Buddhist monasticism in the United States.

And then there is the dialogue between Catholic and Buddhist monastics. Buddhism and Christianity are the two biggest monasticisms in the world. If they could partner in realizing, in a

non-dogmatic, non-sectarian way, that beyond ideology and beyond their belief in God or Buddha or whatever it is, that the monastic lifestyle and education itself is what is critical. They would thereby empower each other in a certain way.

The efforts of local monks and nuns who want to work with their Tibetan counterparts in developing a lifestyle that is beyond ideology, so to speak, have been crippled by the overall Church that is not supporting this partnership. They still have this exclusivism doctrine that says that "only the Church can save you" rather than realizing that the Church is just a tool of the force of universal love.

The militaristic-industrial-corporate society is showing us that it is destroying the earth and destroying society and making more people unhappy than happy. Things will change when this way has been fully discredited, when we understand how destructive it is to almost everybody—even to the wealthy people. Once militarism is fully discredited and abandoned we are going to have great facilities; the Pentagon will be a monastery! The big military bases in California will become monasteries! (Laughs) They will become monastic universities on a huge scale and all of the Rambos will be doing Zen meditation like the samurai did when Japan finally became a peaceful country for a while. I see a bright future.

At Columbia, my university—or any of these Ivy League schools here on the East Coast—we have to face the truth that we are not really producing fully-educated people. We give them great cleverness of critical insight, intelligence, the ability to write, a scientific ability to make machines and drugs and develop artistic abilities to some extent, but we don't give them any ability to control their own emotions, to control their own ideological fanaticisms, to really understand how their psychology works and therefore make sure that they are going to have happy lives in addition to productive ones.

It has nothing to do with believing some religious thing or not, but having to do with learning to control a negative world view and negative emotions and developing positive psyches. This has to become part of education. That is what monastic institutes have guaranteed in the past. And that will become a *sine qua non* of university education in the future. We will be seeing it at West Point. We will be seeing it at Annapolis and that will be the day! (Laughs) And maybe my grandchildren will see it or who knows, maybe I will be doddering along and I'll see a little movement in that direction. I hope so and I hope that you do, too.

6. Rob Preece:
Psychology—The Bridge Between Buddhism and the West

Mandala July–September 2013

Born in England, Rob Preece met Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Kopan Monastery in 1973. Since then, he has practiced both Tibetan Buddhism and psychotherapy, and works to bring these together, particularly synthesizing Buddhism with Jungian approaches. He is the author of The Psychology of Buddhist Tantra, The Wisdom of Imperfection, The Courage to Feel, *and* Preparing for Tantra.

Preece spoke with Mandala *managing editor Laura Miller.*

Mandala: How did you come to be interested in how Buddhism relates to Western psychology?

Preece: I met both Buddhism and the work of Jung while I was at university studying psychology, so these two have been alongside each other since that time. I met the Lamas [Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche] in Nepal in 1973, and a few years later, in 1976, Lama Yeshe came to the UK and it was clear he was interested in the link between Eastern and Western psychology. He always encouraged me to explore this connection. When I was in India in retreat in the early 1980s, I was reading some of Jung's collected works alongside my tantric practice and it was partly out of that that the book *The Psychology of Buddhist Tantra* began to emerge. When I returned to the West in 1985, I trained to be a psychotherapist and since that time I have taught many workshops on comparative Jungian psychology and Buddhism.

Mandala: There seems to be a growing recognition that our Western psychological problems may not easily be understood by Tibetans. What are your thoughts on this?

Preece: In the West, we grow up in a particularly challenging environment where the demands and pressures of Western culture have a strong psychological impact on us. The dysfunctional nature of our family life, for many people, also causes a great deal of emotional and psychological wounding. Teachers from the East have not experienced this and so are often surprised by the degree of emotional problems we have and are sometimes unclear as to what will actually help. They have also not been educated in a psychological understanding of the kind of problems we have. So why would we assume they know what we need? Over the past years I have worked with many Buddhist practitioners who have psychological difficulties particularly arising from early childhood, such as a chronic lack of self-worth or depression. Often they have found traditional Buddhist teachings do not help.

One reason for this is that in Buddhism there is no model of the psychological development of our sense of self-identity and the ego. Buddhism begins at a place of relative maturity where it is assumed that we already have a well-established or strong sense of self. The problem is that for many of us in the West we do not have a well-developed healthy sense of self because of wounding in childhood. If the psychological problems that arise from childhood are then not addressed, we can easily put a veneer of spiritual practice and sometimes quite profound spiritual experiences over deep unresolved psychological problems. This is what John Welwood called "spiritual

bypassing". In mentoring contexts I meet many people who have practiced Buddhism for years, even done long retreats, and yet find they have not resolved chronic emotional or psychological issues.

Mandala: Is there something Dharma centers and teachers in the West can do to help with these issues?

Preece: I would say that there are a number of things that would be beneficial for centers and teachers to do. One is to begin to take seriously that we cannot always resolve everything by Dharma practice alone and that psychological help of some form is sometimes needed. What I personally believe is that teachers, Western and Tibetan, should learn more about Western psychology. I think the complexity of Western psychological problems is such that psychological understanding needs to be added to Buddhist thinking. I feel one of the beauties of Buddhism is that it has the capacity to evolve in this way. I also think it would be helpful for Western teachers to study counseling or possibly psychotherapy so that they have a deeper understanding of what helps Western psychopathology. Just having knowledge of the Dharma does not mean we are able to apply it to people's complex psychological difficulties.

Another thing that would also be beneficial is that we need to apply Buddhist practices in a way that relates more directly to individual psychology so that they actually begin to heal our problems, not just cover them up with lots of intellectual knowledge and formal practices. If we can skillfully use practices in a more creative way, then we can use them to more specifically address our problems. This, I feel, is something that Lama Yeshe understood, and he was willing to be much more creative around practice.

Mandala: Can you share something about the retreats that you lead concerning tantra? Do you explore these issues?

Preece: There has been a tendency for many of us to take on all kinds of advanced tantric practices but not really have grounding in meditation and how to actually work with tantric practice in a way that really becomes a more integrated experience. I want to introduce the practice of tantra in a way that was much more in the way Lama Yeshe would do, so that we can begin to get a taste of the meditation, not just long sadhana recitations. He emphasized that we actually need to meditate on the experience of the deity, and my wish with these retreats is to gradually guide people into meditation experience that goes deeper than conceptual knowledge.

Therefore, first I begin to restore a healthy way in which we relate to our emotional life and the body, so that we become a stable vehicle for the potential transformation that tantra can bring. Follow-up retreats then gradually deepen and develop aspects of tantric practice through a training process that will hopefully create a really sound basis of experience. To use Lama Yeshe's expression, "to taste the chocolate."

Mandala: What is there to be gained from thinking about the relationship between Western psychology and Buddhism?

Preece: What I would like to say is that when Buddhism went into Tibet it took on the flavor of

Tibetan culture so that today we need to gradually discern what is Tibetan and what is actually the essence of Buddhism. We inevitably need to ask what is beneficial to Westerners as we integrate Buddhism into the West with our own cultural and psychological background. From my own experience, Western psychology and psychotherapy is learning a great amount from Buddhism, and I think Buddhism grows by learning from Western psychology. I know there are those who are afraid of this because they fear that change will lose the essence of Buddhism, but I do not think this needs to happen. In fact, I feel that we can become rigid and stuck in our beliefs if we do not allow evolution to occur. Western psychological understanding enhances the potential for the Dharma to be beneficial and accessible for Western minds. I feel there is a very rich and inspiring bridge that is unfolding as Buddhism comes to the West. In my own work I am attempting to follow something that Lama Yeshe always encouraged. I feel that he had a vision that was far beyond my comprehension, but was an extraordinary guiding light.

7. Dr. John Dunne: On Mindfulness

Mandala Online January-March 2014

Dr. John Dunne, born in 1961, has a Ph.D. from Harvard University and holds the Distinguished Chair in Contemplative Humanities at the Center for Healthy Minds *at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He also holds a co-appointment in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the same university. He is a Fellow of the* Mind and Life Institute *and an academic advisor for the* Rangjung Yeshe Institute *in Nepal. He is the author of* Foundations of Dharmakirti's Philosophy *and numerous other publications.*

Dunne spoke with Mandala *managing editor Laura Miller.*

Mandala: I wanted to talk to you about the concept of mindfulness and how it has been articulated and used both historically and in contemporary settings. Within the FPMT, Lama Zopa Rinpoche has encouraged students to understand mindfulness within the Mahayana tradition. I was wondering if you could talk about how mindfulness was used in classical Indian Buddhist philosophy, and whether subsequently that changed within Tibetan Buddhism.

Dunne: If we just think about the contemporary use of mindfulness, there is a lot of interest in mindfulness on many levels. You could say it has even become a kind of cultural trope in the United States. I heard it on the radio sometime when I was listening to NPR during a pledge drive. Someone was talking about "mindful pledging"! I was surprised to find that; you see that everywhere, even in Europe and among the educated elites of the big cities as well. There is a lot of interest in mindfulness. It is a cultural meme that has taken off to an unbelievable degree. And maybe that's part of the reason why it is also very hard to say what it is. It is in some ways whatever you make of it, and there really are many different varieties of mindfulness.

One of the ways in which my scientific colleagues and I have been trying to understand it is therefore not in terms of finding a single version of what is the one true mindfulness, but rather to think of it as a family or range of practices and practice styles that come out of different kinds of Buddhist contexts. That is actually a very useful way to think about it in Buddhist terms as well, because it is really not the case that there is just one version of mindfulness even within Buddhism, possibly ever. Certainly by the time Buddhism reaches Tibet, there is already some significant differentiation in how it would be proper to use that term.

You probably know that the term tracks back to the Pali word *sati* which is the Sanskrit word *smrti* which is the Tibetan word *dränpa*. That word itself is used in many different ways. If we just think of the term *sati*, there is actually quite a lot of variety. My colleague Rupert Gethin has written a number of really great pieces in which he talks about that term, and also Bhikkhu Bodhi has done some great work on this. Bhikkhu Analayo is another one who has done some great work on this on the use of the term in the context of the Pali canon and in Theravada practice. In a famous text called the *Questions of King Milinda*, the term is used very much just in the sense of memory—how do you recall what is beneficial, recalling what one has done in the past and what one intends to do in the future. Those three words—*sati*, *smrti*, and *dränpa*—all literally mean memory, often memory connected to the sense of who you are as a practitioner, what your larger goals are, and

that meaning of mindfulness is something that has become a little bit lost in the contemporary context.

However, when we talk about it as mindfulness practice, actually that sense of mindfulness is not the main meaning probably. The main meaning is cultivating a particular kind of mental facet of any mental moment, or according to some Buddhist Abhidharma theorists, it is always a facet of every mental moment. It depends on who you talk to. The Theravada Abhidharma says it is only in virtuous mind states. The Abhidharma that the Tibetans follow says it can be both in virtuous and nonvirtuous mind states, and this is what they call a *semjung* in Tibetan or *caitasika* in Sanskrit, basically, a "mental function" or a "mental facet."

This particular mental facet is what is being especially trained in formal mindfulness practice. What is that particular mental facet? It is not really about memory in any very direct way; it is really the facet of mind that keeps the mind from wandering. It is actually what keeps the mind not in a positive sense on the object, but in a negative sense off of other objects. There are other mental facets that keep the mind focused that account for how acute the mind is and how sharp the focus is, but this particular facet is really just about a kind of stability.

I haven't seen any account of why this becomes the main facet that is trained in this form of practice. But it may be that the human mind has this tendency to fly all over the place, and that the best way to guarantee that the mind is stable is to focus that particular kind of facet and to focus the training on that particular kind of facet. You could say that later as this develops in the Tibetan tradition, this thing connects to a general feature that we can call "stability in meditation." *Nächa* is a term that you will find in some traditional Tibetan meditation manuals. The *nächa* is stability of a meditative state on the one hand—and that is provided by mindfulness—but mindfulness is not the end of the story by any means. There are two other important features of this factor that are really critically important and that develop later, that really are more about the Mahayana version of mindfulness. They are there in the earlier materials, but they are much more emphasized in the Mahayana, and they change their meanings a little bit. One of them, in Sanskrit, is called *samprajñana*. In Tibetan, it is called *shezhin*, and this is a kind of capacity to keep track of the state of mind and body. Depending on the theorist you talk to, that either is something that occurs simultaneously while you are on the object, or it requires you to drop the object momentarily and sort of introspect on the mind (and that will be important for another reason in a second). Basically, if you are trying to maintain awareness on the breath, mindfulness is what keeps the mind from wavering off of that object, but you also need to assess the quality of your awareness as you are watching your breath, because as you get more and more advanced of course, you are not just dropping the object entirely, you are actually able to stay on the object and notice before you lose the object when the mind is becoming unstable in some fashion. The faculty that is doing that—that is sort of monitoring the quality of the mind—is called *samprajñana* or *shezhin*. That is actually so integral to mindfulness practice that the Tibetans usually compound *dränpa* and *shezhin* to make *dränshe*, which means mindfulness, and some people translate that as "discriminating alertness."

What is interesting about *shezhin* is it then has a little bit of a life of its own. It is something Shantideva talks about a great deal. He has an entire chapter devoted to it—the fifth chapter of *The Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. It becomes, in some ways, almost more of what we think of as

mindfulness practice, which is a kind of moment-by-moment awareness of what you are doing. Where is your mind? Where is your body? What are your intentions? Are you in a virtuous mindstate or in a negative mindstate? That is really all the work that is done by *shezhin* or *samprajñana,* this sort of monitoring capacity or discriminating alertness.

Along with that then, a third quality is usually mentioned in the Tibetan texts, which is called *bakyö* in Tibetan or *apramada* in Sanskrit. It basically means "heedfulness." Those three together—*dränpa*, *shezhin*, and *bakyö*—really give you the package of mindfulness in the Tibetan Mahayana context. The kind of practice we are talking about is stability, but also this kind of stability with awareness, not a just dumb focus on an object, but a rich awareness of what is happening to you on the subject side. What emotional states are you in? What is the quality of your awareness? Are you holding too tightly onto the object? Are you so loose that you are about to lose it? Are negative emotions beginning to arise? Are you in a positive emotional state? This capacity to sort of monitor that even while remaining on the object is really the main thing that is cultivated in mindfulness practice. Then the larger context of it is your spiritual goals, and that is where heedfulness comes in—to be heedful of what your vows are, what your goals are, what your motivations are, all of that together.

The other thing though that really becomes important in Tibetan mindfulness is the development of mindfulness in the Mahamudra context. What really is significantly different from non-Mahayana versions of mindfulness is that now there is a notion of being mindful without being focused on an object. You'll see this is in the Gelugpa version of Mahamudra, but it is perhaps more strongly stressed by the Kagyu style of Mahamudra, and then you see similar aspects to Dzogchen. This is the notion that one can retain that kind of awareness—an awareness of what is the state of mind, what is the quality of the awareness, what types of mental states are occurring, what is the quality of consciousness itself—by taking that monitoring faculty and in a sense, ramping it up, and no longer focusing on an object, dropping the object entirely so that now what you have left is that monitoring awareness itself. You are still going to latch onto objects now and then, so it is not truly a nondual awareness, but it is moving toward a nondual awareness because it is no longer a sort of thematizing focus on the object such as the breath. Alan Wallace has a nice way of describing this where it is as if the breath becomes like a buoy out in the water that you keep your hand on, and then you sort of let go and slowly learn how to not need to hold on to that anymore, and are simply aware of the mind itself without focusing on any particular object.

That capacity is the way, theoretically, where *shezhin* or *samprajñana*, this sort of discriminating alertness, is now what is mostly thematized. Stability is still important, and they still talk about *smrti*, or *dränpa*, but now it is *dränpa* without an object. Instead what they speak about is what is called in Tibetan—and you will see this in the famous Mahamudra text that His Holiness the Dalai Lama taught at Emory University by Losang Choekyi Gyaltsen, and also in the earlier Kagyu Mahamudra materials—called *ma-yeng-tsam gyi dränpa* in Tibetan which means "mindfulness of mere non-distraction." That mindfulness of mere non-distraction is now not about focusing on any particular object, but simply being aware moment-by-moment of all that is occurring in the mind. That type of awareness, of course, is part of the goal. Part of the reason you cultivate that type of awareness is so that you really understand what is the nature of your mind, what is the nature of your negative mental states. It is a tool for that purpose.

Mandala: Why has mindfulness become such a popular theme in our modern culture?

Dunne: Modern mindfulness is very heavily influenced by its psychological use. My good friend and colleague, Jon Kabat-Zinn has not been single-handedly responsible for that, but almost. Jon comes out of a primarily nondual, Zen background, with Korean Zen, or Seon Buddhism, as one of his main sources for this style. The style of mindfulness that he developed is a style of mindfulness that is very much more of the nondual direction. One of the features of the nondual traditions in general is that they claim that somehow the qualities of enlightenment are fully innate to the mind itself, so that, in a way, practice is just about getting out of the way. It is not about doing something; it is really mostly about not doing something, and the natural qualities of enlightenment will then emerge. Hence, on that model of practice, there is not a lot of emphasis on ethics or compassion, because it is thought that those will emerge naturally if you simply become aware of the nature of mind itself and allow that nature of mind to become fully evident to you, to, in a sense, blossom or "buddha," literally (which is what "buddha" means whenever its meaning is to blossom), then the ethical activity and compassionate activity and so on will just spontaneously manifest. Now, that is a totally legitimate Buddhist position. There is nothing at all problematic about that, but it also happens to align very well with certain features of our modern lives and what you might call the style of modernity. There is great work on this. There is a book by David McMahan called *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* in which he discusses some of this. David also has recently received a Mind and Life Contemplative Studies fellowship to take some of that work to the next step. You could say that, as David points out and some other people as well, there are some basic features of liberal religiosity or spirituality in modernity that that style of mindfulness very easily adapts to. They go hand-in-hand to a certain degree.

There is a whole story about the turn away from rationality and toward affect or emotion in the 19th century. Some people say that the paragon of this is Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, the 19th-century German theologian who basically says that true religiosity is about feeling. It is not about what you believe. Of course, with scientific rationality critiquing so much of what religions believe and with his audience being largely artists and so on who already are alienated from the church that was telling them, "Oh, this is the creed you need to accept." This is a way to kind of insulate religiosity from scientific rationality. Science can have all of the natural world; religion is just about feeling. It is just about some inexpressible feeling even.

Another feature is the tendency toward Western individualism that emerges in modernity that also is [characterized by] a sense of individuals being their own authority, and that then standing in opposition to traditional religious institutions acting as authorities. Not only is their authority declining—people call it the "secularization thesis"—in which religious tradition or religious authority declines as modernity grows. (There is some question about whether that is true, but in any case, certainly [it's applicable] for people who are liberal in their religiosity)—but the reaction to the critique of traditional authority is not to fight back.

There was a great article in the *New York Times* about two rafting trips down the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. One is a group of Darwinists who go down and look at all the fossils and say, "See, so evolution works." The other is creationists who go down and look at all the same fossils and say, "Yeah, so the world was created by God." The creationists are not being irrational. They are being rational. They are fighting against science using what they think counts as good evidence,

which includes scripture. A person liberal in their religiosity says, "We're not going to fight against science." So what's left? Just a sense of spirit, just affect, just feeling. That is what left. Since the institutions are based upon that type of authority and since there is also the sense of individual authority growing in modernity, then the move away from institutional religion to a kind of personal religion—no need to hold a creed, an ability to have your own practice, so to speak—is a big appeal of modern mindfulness.

Another feature that is very important in modernity is that life is about *now*, especially the *new* now, the *fresh* now. Those are very traditional metaphors. For example, in Dzogchen and Mahamudra too, the idea of freshness—the freshness of the present moment—exists. Those kinds of metaphors in the nondual traditions align very well with this spirit of modernity which is all about *the now*, not about the next life, not about the transcendent, but the here and now. Those various aspects of modernity just align with these traditions such that they are in many ways challenging mainstream traditions and deliberately exist in opposition or on the margins. They were always in the minority; in some ways now they've become the majority. It is interesting.

8. Ven. Thubten Chodron: Buddhism's Common Ground

Mandala October–December 2014

Ven. Thubten Chodron, born in the US in 1950, ordained as a nun in the Tibetan tradition in 1977 and received full ordination in Taiwan in 1986. Ven. Chodron has studied extensively with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tsenshab Serkong Rinpoche, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and Lama Yeshe, among other Tibetan masters. She teaches Buddhist philosophy and meditation worldwide, and has published many books including Buddhism for Beginners, Taming the Mind, *and* Don't Believe Everything You Think. *She is the founder and abbess of Sravasti Abbey, a monastic community in Washington State, US.*

Ven. Chodron was interviewed by Mandala *managing editor Laura Miller about her 2014 book* Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions, *which she co-authored with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.*

Mandala: Tell me how this book project came about and the intentions behind it.

Ven. Chodron: It must have been 1993, or perhaps 1994. I went to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and requested him please to write a short lamrim root text that was especially for Westerners, because lamrim assumes the student is familiar with certain points and has a particular worldview. However, Westerners have grown up in a different culture and don't have the Buddhist worldview when they begin studying the Dharma. I requested, "It would be so helpful if you could write a text for Westerns that contained all these points and that the geshes could use as a root text for their teachings." His Holiness responded, "Before we do that, we should first write a long explanation on the lamrim." He then gave me a transcript of a teaching he had given on the lamrim text *Sacred Words of Manjushri* and said, "Use this as a basis, add more material and come back with something." I came back a few years later and by that time, the manuscript was book-sized. We started to read through it to check it, and after a couple of days His Holiness said, "I don't have time to go through the whole manuscript," and asked Geshe Dorje Damdul to help me. So we started working together.

In the meantime, I was learning more and more and listening to more and more of His Holiness' teachings. The book kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. At some point, I met with His Holiness and showed him the manuscript again, and he said, "This book should be unique. Put in material from other Buddhist traditions so practitioners in the Tibetan community and the West can learn about the Theravada tradition and the Chinese tradition. Do research on these." His office gave me a letter to show others when I asked for their assistance in the research.

I did this research, and from time to time went to see His Holiness to ask him questions and clarify points. At one point it became clear that what His Holiness wanted was a book that showed the various Buddhist traditions—their similarities and their differences. His intention was to dispel people's misconceptions about other Buddhist traditions, to show how all the teachings go back to the Buddha, and thus to bring the Buddhist traditions closer to each other. He wanted a book in English that could be translated into Tibetan, Thai, Sinhalese, Chinese, and so on. So from this

huge manuscript, which by that time if published would have probably been four or five volumes, I extracted the essential points and narrowed it down into what I call the "small book," which is around 350 pages. That is the book that is entitled *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*. Wisdom Publications is publishing it. My hope is to go back to the long manuscript, polish that up, and get it out in print later on.

Mandala: You cover a tremendous amount of ground in this book. Can you talk a little bit about how you approached researching and organizing the material?

Ven. Chodron: There were certain topics that His Holiness definitely wanted included, for example, the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths. The other topics were fundamental topics common to all the traditions: refuge, the three higher trainings, selflessness, the four immeasurables. The Pali tradition also speaks of generating bodhichitta and following the path of the perfections, so that, too, is included. These topics are vast but are presented as succinctly as possible.

Something I was enthused to talk about in the book is similarities between the traditions that I didn't know existed before. Since the time I lived in Singapore, where there are a variety of Buddhist traditions, I've been aware that Buddhists have a lot of misconceptions about other traditions. For example, many Chinese think Tibetan Buddhists practice magic and that Tibetan Buddhism is degenerate because of tantra. Most Tibetans believe that the Chinese do blank-minded meditation and that all the people who practice in the Pali tradition are selfish. The Pali tradition looks at the Tibetans and says, "Do they practice vinaya? It doesn't look like it," and "tantra isn't the Buddha's teachings." None of these ideas are correct.

Seeing this, I understood His Holiness' reason for wanting to have this book show, from the side of the teachings, what we have in common and where we have differences. Then people can see that all the traditions adhere to the same basic teachings and that a lot of the misconceptions that we have about each other are just that—misconceptions.

Mandala: In the West, at least with Buddhist converts, we tend to be open to intra-Buddhist dialogue. Is this different in Asia?

Ven. Chodron: People who live in Buddhist countries in Asia tend to know very little about other Buddhist traditions. In Thailand, people will know something about Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Burma, but not so much outside of that. The Tibetans know about Buddhism in Mongolia, but what they know about Buddhism in China or Theravada countries is limited. Only when you go to places such as Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Europe, and North America do you find temples, centers, and practitioners from a variety of Buddhist traditions and thus there is a greater opportunity for people to learn about other traditions. Otherwise the average Tibetan monk, for example, who lives in India will have very little interest or opportunity to go to Thailand to meet the monastics there, and very few Theravada monastics will visit Tibetan monasteries in India. In the United States, on the other hand, each year monastics from a wide variety of Buddhist traditions meet to get to know each other and discuss topics of mutual interest. This year, 2014, is our 20th Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering.

Mandala: Let's talk a little bit about the terms you have chosen to use for the book. For example at the beginning you explain the "Sanskrit tradition" and the "Pali tradition" and how these traditions connect to the different traditions practiced today, but you don't use the word "Mahayana" in this context at all.

Ven. Chodron: In recent years His Holiness has used the terms "Pali tradition" and "Sanskrit tradition" and stopped using "Hinayana" and "Mahayana." No one refers to their own tradition as "Hinayana," and that term is very offensive. I didn't want to use "Theravada" and "Mahayana" because those words are easily misunderstood. Westerners often speak of three Buddhist traditions: Vipassana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Many people think that "Mahayana" refers only to Zen and Pure Land, and that Vajrayana is synonymous with Tibetan Buddhism. This is incorrect. Actually, vipassana is a meditation technique found in all Buddhist traditions. Mahayana practice rests on the foundation of practices explained in the context of the hearer's vehicle. Mahayana is not something totally separate and unrelated, as people often think it is. In many cases, Mahayana philosophy elaborates on points raised in the early sutras and the Pali canon. Furthermore, Vajrayana is a branch of Mahayana, and thus depends on knowing the four noble truths as well as the bodhisattva practices. In addition, not all of Tibetan Buddhist thought and practice is contained in Vajrayana. In fact, Tibetan Buddhism contains the fundamental practices associated with the four noble truths as also described in the Pali canon, the bodhisattva practice of the ten perfections as presented in Mahayana sutras and treatises, and then Vajrayana practices found in the tantras.

Pali literature mainly describes a hearer's path, but a bodhisattva path is also presented. Sanskrit literature mainly speaks about a bodhisattva path, but a hearer's path is also present. Considering things in this light, the various Buddhist traditions have a lot in common.

Mandala: What is the Pali tradition and canon and how does it relates to the Sanskrit tradition and canon?

Ven. Chodron: The Pali tradition is principally practiced in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and parts of Vietnam. Like the Sanskrit canon, the Pali canon consists of "three baskets" of teachings: vinaya, sutta, and abhidhamma. The material contained in each basket has some overlap, but there are many different scriptures as well.

What we now call the Pali tradition became public in the world during the Buddha's time. The Buddha spoke a Prakrit [a local Indian language], and later those early suttas were put into Pali. Similarly, the early commentaries were written in Sinhalese and later translated into Pali. What we call the Sanskrit tradition became public and was widely circulated later. While some scholars say it was fabricated, His Holiness of course doesn't agree and suggests other reasons for its later appearance.

The majority of lamrim topics are found in both the Pali and Sanskrit literature: precious human life (including the example of the tortoise putting his head through the golden yoke), impermanence and death, the praise to the Buddha that we say at the beginning of teachings, the four fearlessnesses of the Buddha, the ten powers of the Buddha, karma and its effects, the four

noble truths, the noble eightfold path, the twelve links of dependent arising, the monastic discipline of the vinaya and the divisions of afflictions (there are differences, but also much overlap) are all in common.

In the Tibetan canon itself, very few sutras are in common with those in the Pali canon. But, there is so much in the lamrim that is the same as in the Pali canon, so how did those teachings get into the lamrim? Here, we see the role of the great Indian commentators who wrote the shastras [commentaries]. They quoted passages of the early sutras—sutras found in Pali, Sanskrit, and Central Asian languages. So much of the foundational teachings in the lamrim came into the Tibetan tradition through these commentaries, through sages such as Asanga and Vasubandhu.

Studying the Pali suttas and commentaries gave me a much better ideas of where Nagarjuna was coming from—what views were commonly debated at his time. It seems to me that he was refuting the substantialist views of the Savastivada sect. He did this by taking arguments found in the Pali suttas and Sanskrit sutras and redefining the object of negation, making it more subtle. Many of Nagarjuna's arguments in his *Treatise on the Middle Way* are shared with Pali suttas, and he is building on those arguments. One of the refutations we in the Tibetan tradition use in refuting inherent existence is the diamond slivers, which says that things aren't produced by self, other, both, or causelessly. I was surprised to discover that refutation is in the Pali canon. The depth of the object of negation may not be the same in the Pali, but the refutation itself is there. Nagarjuna's five point argument analyzing whether the I is the same or different from the aggregates, whether the self possesses the aggregates, whether it depends on the aggregates or the aggregates depend on it is also in the Pali suttas. For me, it was exciting to see this similarity and also to respect Nagarjuna's radical approach in negating inherent existence.

The oft quoted passage that the self is a demonic view that is often found in Tibetan teachings is also found in the Pali *Samyutta Nikaya*. Interestingly, it was spoken by a bhikkhuni!

There are suttas in the *Sutta Nipata* that speak about phenomena being insubstantial, like illusions, bubbles, and so on. What is the object of negation here? Is there a difference from the Madhyamaka philosophy?

Mandala: Talk a little more about the bodhisattva path in the Pali tradition.

Ven. Chodron: One of my Dharma friends, a Westerner who is a scholar in the Tibetan tradition, was at a teaching given by a Westerner from the Pali tradition. Afterwards he said to me, "Wow. This person gave a great talk about love and compassion. I didn't know they meditated on those topics." He was so surprised because in the Tibetan tradition we are told that followers of the Pali tradition are selfish and don't really care about others.

There is one text in the Pali canon, the *Buddhavamsa*, that tells the story of Shakyamuni in a previous life when he first generated bodhichitta. I was so moved by that story and imagine it again and again when I bow to the Buddha.

Bhikkhu Bodhi gave me an English translation of a treatise by the 6th-century Pali sage Dhammapala about the "paramis," which are the "paramitas," or, the "perfections." The Pali

tradition contains a list of ten paramis; some of them overlap with the Sanskrit list of ten paramitas, some are different. However, the meaning of even the ones that are different is found in both traditions. Pali suttas also contain the four ways of assembling disciples.

Many of the points that Shantideva spoke about in chapter six of *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* about handling anger and cultivating fortitude are found in Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purification* (5th century) and Dhammapala's *Treatise on the Perfections* (6th century). Shantideva was 8th century; what was the link between these sages?

Bhikkhu Bodhi also told me that he found some passages about the bodhisattva path in Dhammapala's treatise that are almost exactly the same as some passages in Asanga's *Bodhisattva Bhumi*.

Mandala: When working in the Pali tradition in particular, were you working with specific people to help you understand some of the teachings?

Ven. Chodron: Yes. Bhikkhu Bodhi has a series of about 120 teachings on the *Majjhima Nikaya*. I listened to and studied all of those, and Bhikkhu Bodhi was very generous with his time in responding to my many questions. I also started reading the translations of other material in the Pali tradition, such as their *Abhidhamma*, the *Path of Purification*, and Dhammapala's *Treatise on the Paramis*. There is still so much more for me to learn and I'm enjoying it tremendously.

Mandala: That sounds like it was a rather beautiful process in and of itself—connecting with different traditions and scholars and teachers.

Ven. Chodron: His Holiness wanted me to stay in a Thai monastery, so I did that. I received teachings from the *ajahn* [teacher] there. Staying at that Theravada monastery was an eye-opening experience for all of us. I'm a bhikshuni [fully-ordained nun], and the monks there didn't know what to do with me because there were no Thai bhikshunis at that time. But it all worked out very well.

I went to Taiwan too and met with different practitioners and scholars there to do the research for the book. Ven. Dharmamitra, an American monk in Seattle, is translating a lot of the Chinese Buddhist material into English, and he, too, was generous in sharing his translations. Another Chinese American monk was very helpful as well. Working on this book has been a wonderful opportunity for me in so many ways, and I'm very grateful for being able to do this.

Mandala: Who is the audience for the book and who would benefit from reading it?

Ven. Chodron: Of course, I want everybody in the world to read it! On a more serious note, His Holiness has in mind people from the various Buddhist traditions in Asia as well as the West. He wants the book translated into many Asian and European languages and made available to the Sangha and the lay followers in Buddhist countries. His Holiness says that he has had much closer contact with Christians, Jews, and Muslims than he has had with Buddhists from other Buddhist traditions. He believes that as a Buddhist community we need to come together and understand each other better, to accept and respect each other so we can act as a more unified force in the

world. He wants us to learn about and appreciate both our similarities and differences, and in that way reduce sectarianism born from misconceptions.

Mandala: What are the plans for translation?

Ven. Chodron: The English will come out first. One of the reasons I chose Wisdom Publications to publish the book is that publisher Tim McNeil was very open and enthusiastic to help find excellent Asian language translators. Through their agents Wisdom will be in contact with different publishing companies in Asia. If those publishing companies have their own translators, we want to check the translation because His Holiness was very clear that the translations should be excellent. We are also talking to individuals that we know from the different traditions to find good translators. In some of the countries, we may have to print the book for free distribution because that is the way many Dharma books are circulated in certain places. There is still a lot to do to reach the audience His Holiness would like to reach.

Mandala: What would you say you have gained as a teacher and as a practitioner from working on this project?

Ven. Chodron: This deepened my respect and admiration for the Buddha as a skilled teacher. He gave many teachings, but all were for the purpose of leading sentient beings, who have very different inclinations and interests, to awakening. No matter whether we follow the Pali or the Sanskrit tradition, we are all followers of the same teacher.

I also gained a broader appreciation for the teachings in the various traditions. The teachings in the Pali suttas about the disadvantages of samsara are very powerful, and meditating on them increased my renunciation. Implementing some of the bodhichitta meditations done in the Chinese tradition into my practice was also helpful. When we have good grounding in our own tradition and then learn the teachings in other traditions, we can make our minds much broader and more flexible by understanding the Dharma through different words, different images, and different language.

Researching the book and editing His Holiness' teachings were a tremendous aid to my own Dharma education and practice. Writing forced me to think more deeply about the teachings because before you can write or edit Dharma material, you have to think more deeply about it and deepen your understanding. Otherwise what you write doesn't make sense.

This project was, and still is, an offering to His Holiness. Working on it strengthened my connection with him and my respect for the brilliance of his mind and the depth of his kindness, compassion, and concern for sentient beings.

Working on this book brought home to me that serving our spiritual mentors and the Three Jewels, and benefiting sentient beings, come to the same point.

After this book is published, I would like to offer it to His Holiness and then request his permission to get the rest of the larger manuscript in print. The larger volumes will serve a valuable purpose because at present there are many shorter lamrim books written from geshes' oral

teachings and there are translations of Indian and Tibetan philosophical treatises. There is very little in between. I'm envisioning the larger volumes as something that will help people who aren't yet prepared to read the treatises with their technical language, but who are ready to go beyond the basic books.

9. Dr. Jeffrey Hopkins: Transmitting Honesty

Mandala Online January 2015

Dr. Jeffrey Hopkins, Ph.D., born in the US in 1940, is professor emeritus at the University of Virginia and one of the world's top scholars of Buddhism. He has published over forty books, acted as His Holiness the Dalai Lama's translator, and had a long academic career during which he trained many prominent scholars and translators. He currently leads UMA Institute for Tibetan Studies. Hopkins has been remarkably open about many facets of his life and here talks about the role of honesty in Buddhism in the West.

Hopkins spoke with Mandala *associate editor Donna Lynn Brown.*

Mandala: What is the source of your frankness? Why are you so open?

Hopkins: I was born in Barrington, Rhode Island, and I was in my teens in the 1950s. There was a group of us who were disgusted by the aims that were being presented to us: merely making money and so forth. There was a lot of rebellion that was focused against the dishonesty of society, which gradually in my own mind became a matter of seeking my own integrity. My own integrity meant a great deal to me.

I was part of a juvenile gang that got into difficulty with the law, in the sense of increasingly violent pranks, drinking, and so forth. It was a relief when I went to a liberal prep school where students were given a great deal of responsibility for their own governance. Despite all my acting out at my public school, I responded very well in that kind of environment, and got excellent grades, because we were respected as people, which is something I had lacked prior to that. Then, in my first year at Harvard, I read *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau and I was inspired to leave Harvard for the woods of Vermont. I stayed in a small one-room cabin and read, wrote poetry, walked a lot, dreamt out my recurrent trapped dreams, and I believe at that point, began finding my own integrity. And I kept returning to that kind of life.

I was inspired by Herman Melville's novel *Typee*, which is set in the Marquesas, north of Tahiti near the equator, and Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence* about the artist Paul Gauguin, who painted in the South Seas. It was 1960 and when Vermont got too cold for the wood heater, I went to the woods in Rhode Island. When that got too cold, I shipped out of New York as a passenger on a freighter to Tahiti. I had gotten used to meditating in Vermont on the lake that was down below, and by gazing off into space. On the freighter I would lie on my back and stare upward, filling my mind with the blueness of the sky. The Pacific Ocean was clean and tremendously calm and I filled my mind with that. I didn't have a visa for Tahiti and after a while some official noticed this and asked me to leave. I used all but my last $15 to take a seaplane to Hawaii. It was nuts, but it was a search for my own integrity.

Mandala: You were among the earliest scholars to show respect for Eastern scholars, and acknowledge what you learned from them, rather than claiming that you knew more than your "native informants." Where did your intellectual honesty come from?

Hopkins: This was related to my attitude of searching. Why would I pretend that what l learned from a Tibetan scholar was something I put together myself? Why would I treat these people as somehow different from myself? I thought it was very important, extremely important, to treat every Tibetan scholar fairly, to give them credit for their part in producing any book. I was criticized for this by other professors in my own field. But it just made more sense to have, say, Lati Rinpoche, be a co-author, than to footnote everything he said. In time, people came to understand what collaboration meant. The old saying of "East is East and West is West" doesn't carry over to how you treat people on the title page of a book.

Mandala: By making clear what came from others, you revealed that the Western scholar wasn't always the final expert. Did other academics criticize you for that?

Hopkins: Yes, they did, and I just chose to ignore it. I spoke in 2014 at the Tsadra Translation & Transmission Conference about singing my own song, and what I meant is that certain priorities needed to be righted, and we would right them by how we acted and what we did. It means acknowledging the help you receive and the roles others play, and if those roles are prominent enough, then the person deserves equal billing as the author or the translator. If I couldn't have understood the text without somebody informing me of its meaning, then that person has played an equal role in its translation even if they don't know English, because I couldn't have translated it otherwise. Not to mention the person's contribution to the footnotes or the explanation that goes along with the translation. This approach has come to be generally accepted. And then also I wanted to point out that many of the academic concerns that Tibetan and Mongolian scholars have are similar to ours. Both sides can learn from the other, though I don't like talking about sides. I think we are all more or less in the same soup.

Mandala: Sometimes in Dharma centers people avoid sharing their real views or feelings. This helps maintain harmony, but at a price. It makes me wonder about the balance between building community and nourishing the individual.

Hopkins: I would compare it to when I started in academia. At that time, there was a lot of shouting among scholars. I thought it had a lot to do with how little we knew about the subjects we were talking about. And I had to admit that of myself also. I was so egregiously, embarrassingly ignorant on many of these topics. I could see how I could stumble into trying to cover up my ignorance by shouting or making a big fuss over something I knew that somebody else didn't know. And then I tried very hard to avoid doing that, and to create an atmosphere in which I was not doing this. I think as this profession and its members have become more educated, there's been less need to yell at each other, and this may be true in Dharma centers also. I've found in the two translation conferences I've been to, and many of these translators are members of Dharma communities, that we have no need at all to shout at each other or show off what we know because we are deeply impressed by what we don't know. We are really happy to hear about these topics from our colleagues and friends who do know something about them. Then it's easy to get along.

A community's insistence on people toeing a line may have a lot to do with being neophytes. And the number of times that neophytes repeat the name of their organization or their lama really strikes me as a sign of weakness. Let's just stop doing that. Still, within the monastic community,

there are rules. Outside of the community, you don't say nasty things about the community, because that disrupts the image of the community, and spreads gossip and so forth. But that implies that there can be criticism *within* the community. You've got to air differences and so forth. You should. But you can't be arguing all the time, or sharing everything you think. Nevertheless, a healthy community has to have some way of airing what's going on. You can't be covering up all the time because it will explode, and the disharmony that will result from that is not going to be helpful.

On a personal level, I try to make the chance of hypocrisy less by admitting in public some of the things that I'm up to. For example, I gave a talk in a city recently and I was really surprised when the people there gave me some money, in envelopes, afterwards. But then also, at the same time, I was very greedy about that money. I kept wondering how much was in each envelope. And I was very careful to put those envelopes down beside me (laughs) so that nobody would walk off with any of them. And I mentioned it to my host afterwards, admitting how greedy I was about it. I try to make this a habit. I don't make up stuff to disclose, because there's plenty of it without making anything up. I may not disclose everything, but at least a whole lot of it. Disclosing it relieves tension, whereas hiding is really counter-productive, because when you hide, you have to simulate the opposite—and, wow, you just get into trouble. I get into trouble!

Mandala: Is this an aspect of the path? Does not being open reduce energy available for practice?

Hopkins: I think that's very, very true. Energy is wasted by hiding, and what you are hiding gets worse and worse the more you hide it. It's self-destructive. You know, sometimes when I talk about morality, I'll just say, "I'm embarrassed about what I am saying, but in any case, I'm trying to present what the books teach as it's written, and I'm not claiming that I can actually enact this, I want to be clear." That makes it a lot easier to talk about it. If it's compassion and the fact that I get angry in certain situations, then it's easy for me to talk about what I get angry at and use that as an example. Being frank about myself undermines my own negative reactions.

But we have to be judicious about what we say. We can't be stupidly open. It's not easy.

Mandala: The magazine *Buddhadharma* focused its Winter 2014 issue on abuses of power in Dharma communities. One theme was "no more secrets," because abuses flourish when people deny, cover up, or ostracize those who speak out. What are your thoughts on this?

Hopkins: I'm not an active member of any group. I'm a member of groups, but from a distance, which gives me a certain safety valve. I don't give any quarter to lamas and so forth who act contrary to moral codes. To me that's simply improper. If I'm asked about that person, I just say what I've heard, I don't cover up, or at least I hope I don't. I'm open about what I've heard and I'll say, "Beware." Covering up or pretending that seemingly ill behavior is the way great lamas behave—I'm just not going to say that. I think that's simply wrong.

Mandala: You have mentioned that your relationship with His Holiness the Dalai Lama is very frank. How open should we be with our lamas?

Hopkins: It depends on what the lama can stand! The lama may not want to hear about it. And then what can you do? You may have to go find some other lama, if that's what you need. Like with anyone, your friends for example, there are certain subjects that some people don't want to hear about. Even your closest friend may not want to hear about your stomach troubles. So you don't talk about it. And how much can anyone stand to hear about your sex life? Or your health problems? Even if you're at death's door, five minutes is the max. It's a bore. You shouldn't expect more than that.

Mandala: Westerners seem to value openness more than Tibetans. Is there a cultural difference?

Hopkins: I don't think Tibetans are different from us. Maybe they are getting away with being secretive about how they are running things here (laughs). They are just getting away with pretending that this is the way that they do it. Tibetans among themselves give each other a hard time. They hold each other to account. Whereas some of them come over here and act as if they are kings or queens. They'll do whatever they can get away with. You don't have to let them.

Mandala: Some Westerners, like you, say they have past life memories. While this may come from a desire to be special, there must be some who really were practitioners in the past. Should people be open about memories if they have them? What about the narcissism factor?

Hopkins: I was faced with this during the five years I was at Geshe Wangyal's monastery in New Jersey in the early 1960s. People would come to visit and talk about their past lives. They were usually princes and princesses. I was looking forward to the day when someone would come and say they were a garbage collector. It's something that kept me from telling my own story because I didn't want to be put in the category that I was putting these people in, which has to do with their own aggrandizing imaginations. With myself, I felt what memories I had were rather ordinary. I had to inspect those few memories to figure out what my so-called status was. I didn't feel glorious. I had to deduce from a few pieces of information what my status might have been. It took a long time for that to come through. I'm suspicious of people who remember themselves as having been very glorious.

Still, I stay neutral on whether people should talk about memories. Although I'm suspicious, I'm not going to put it down. I know in my case that these are actual memories, so I know that does occur. But I wouldn't blame anyone for being highly suspicious if I told my own story in any detail. They might think, "The guy's a nut!" I've had that kind of thought with respect to others. But some people have related their stories to me, and their memories are not self-glorifying. I don't have any reason to question them. I do accept for sure that people remember.

Dr. Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia looked into a lot of reincarnation stories, and checked some against facts he could track down. One of the points that he made was that quite a number of people remembered their past lives because they died in the midst of violence. It was quite often not a case of great spiritual attainment, but that there was some violence that impressed on them what was going on, and that caused the memory.

Mandala: Canadian tulku Elijah Ary has been open since childhood about his past life memories and went through a lot of difficulties.

Hopkins: I know Elijah Ary. I find his story quite poignant. He and I had quite opposite trails. He has been open throughout and I've been closed throughout. I actually forgot it for quite a while and then even after I remembered, it was decades later that I was willing to talk about it at all except with a couple of people. It's been quite a journey for him, and I really respect what he's had to go through to be this open. He paid a huge price. For me, coming out as gay was a big step at the time I did it, but coming out as remembering your past life, as far as I'm concerned, is much larger than that.

Mandala: What does it really tell us if someone has past life memories? Does that make them special now?

Hopkins: I think that Dr. Ian Stevenson's story about people remembering because they died in the midst of violence indicates that it doesn't automatically make you special. What will make you special is what you do in this lifetime. If you think about it, that is true of anybody, recognized or not.

Liushar Thupten Tharpa, who was the equivalent of foreign minister in the old government of Tibet, went out to greet His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he first came to Lhasa; Liushar told me he was watching the little child to see if this was the right one. But he didn't come to any conclusion then whether this was the right or the wrong child. Later he was this Dalai Lama's representative in New York, after which he came to our monastery in New Jersey, and then stayed on in the US as a permanent resident. Then the Dalai Lama called him back to Dharamsala. There were a number of years during which Liushar had not seen this Dalai Lama in action. Anyway, after he went back to India, I saw him. He said, "Do you know what he is doing?" and he recounted to me how busy this Dalai Lama was conducting ordination ceremonies, teaching, giving initiations, all of the many things he was doing. And he said, "Now we can say he is the incarnation of Avalokiteshvara." You see? By way of his actions! That question about whether there were signs that he was the last Dalai Lama was totally wiped out. It didn't matter. His Holiness' actions were sufficient. Whether he was or not didn't make any difference because in his waking day he was endlessly performing these actions.

Mandala: While you are open about many things, you also choose to keep certain things private, such as your own attainments, and ways you've helped others—for example, with their books or academic work.

Hopkins: There's a tradition about not being open about your own attainments and your own deeper experiences, and I don't even tell my friends. It's out of the question, I feel, that I'm going to talk about these things. As for helping others, it's important to do—and keep quiet.

Mandala: Any final thoughts on honesty?

Hopkins: If honesty became one's only watchword, one could become a pain in the ass, and narcissistic, and a total bore. I hope by giving an interview like this, pretending to be honest, I

don't create a trap for myself! That I would become infatuated with this—really. And start deliberately acting this way, thinking, "I've got to be honest! I've got to find something to be honest about!" And turning myself into not just a 25- or 50-percent jerk but a 75- or 90-percent jerk (laughs). Warn me if I do. Tap me on the shoulder and say, "Hey Jeffrey, you *are* turning into a 100-percent jerk."

We are basically incapable of saying who we are, and when we start doing that, we really have to be careful, because we aren't going to be right. There may be some grain of truth—but also some grain of foppishness. I'm trying. I'm still trying to find my own integrity.

10. Rasmus Hougaard: Bringing Dharma into the Corporate World

Mandala Online March 2015

Rasmus Hougaard is the founder and managing director of the Potential Project, an international program based in Copenhagen, Denmark, that works with organizations to equip leaders and employees with methods to be more kind, clear-minded, and efficient. Active in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America, the Potential Project provides Corporate-Based Mindfulness Training, which is a learning program recognized by the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FDCW), an FPMT-affiliated project devoted to Lama Yeshe's vision of universal education. Rasmus is the author of One Second Ahead—Enhance Your Performance with Mindfulness.

Hougaard spoke with Mandala *managing editor Laura Miller.*

Mandala: Tell me a little about yourself and how you came to start the Potential Project.

Hougaard: I'm an FPMT student. I've been that for quite a few years and I feel very closely related to Lama Zopa Rinpoche—just as much as through Lama Yeshe's vision of universal education, which is promoted by FDCW. I was a director of Tong-nyi Nying-je Ling, the FPMT center in Copenhagen, for a number of years. I have been guiding classes there for many years. I've been teaching retreats at FPMT centers around Europe and the world for around the last eight years or so, so I feel very close to FPMT. It is really my family for sure.

Also, I have this very, very strong connection with the whole idea of universal education as Lama Yeshe taught it himself. That really blew my mind when I first heard about it. I joined what would become the FDCW team in London—before it was really a team—when Allison Murdoch was just beginning to start it up years ago. I was part of the first training course on the *16 Guidelines*, the trainer training for that and a number of other things.

At some point, I took a year off to figure out how I could create the most benefit in this short lifetime. I came to the conclusion after a year thinking that I should bring "mind training"—what I call "Dharma in disguise"—into other for-profit and non-profit organizations. I had three main reasons for the project. One is because people in those environments need it a lot, because they are very stressed and they need good tools to cope. You can bring them Dharma in a way in which they will embrace it. They won't go to a Dharma center. Another reason is there is a lot of power in organizations nowadays, so if you can influence them to think more ethically, more compassionately, then there could be a really nice ripple throughout the world, not just in those companies that we would work with. The last one was that everyone needs to be able to make a living off the work that they do, and I just know so many good Dharma students who are working with all kinds of jobs that are fine and good, but where they are not using their best skills of teaching the Dharma. I thought that if we could create a vehicle whereby Dharma teachers could actually join and go and spread the Dharma in disguise in organizations, we would have more happy people, have a better world, and would have income that we could then donate to

organizations like the many FPMT-related centers, projects, and services. That is where it all came from—a vision of doing a lot of good in a very focused way.

Mandala: What's the best way to teach mindfulness? Can we get all the potential benefits of developing mindfulness from Dharma practice in the traditional way of studying the texts, meditating, and doing the practices? What is your perspective on the spectrum of very traditional presentations to very secular?

Hougaard: I think, to make use of the words of the Buddha, the Dharma has "one taste" and it is the taste of freedom. That taste can be presented in many, many different ways. It could be presented, as you say, very traditionally or very secularly. In my mind, it really doesn't matter what you do. It is just important that you think about who your audience is, and then do what works for them—skillful means. I am not attached to the secular. I am not attached to the traditional. I am focused on finding ways of delivering the same messages, the same core, the same essence, the same methods, the same wisdom to people in a way that they can relate to it.

In our work at the Potential Project, we go out to people not only who are not interested in Dharma, but they are not necessarily even interested in mindfulness. The organizations pay for us to do the work, but the people signing up for the course haven't asked for it necessarily. We have to be very, very skillful in presenting mindfulness in a way where they are attracted to it right away and where they find some benefits right away. That is really what I think is very important: look at what the audience needs.

Mandala: When the Potential Project is brought into a company, what do you do? Could you describe the process?

Hougaard: In terms of schedule, we do many different things. What we prefer to do is a large "implementation program," as we call it. This is an eleven-workshop program where we come in for eleven sessions spread over four months. Each session is one and a half hours. We are teaching them basically three things. The first thing is the actual mindfulness practice. During the first five weeks, we teach them what in Sanskrit is called *shamatha* training—stilling the mind—*shiné* in Tibetan. From there we move into *vipassana*, or what's called in Tibetan *lhak tong* training. We go into the basic philosophy of impermanence, dissatisfaction, and emptiness. So that is the foundation of the actual mind training. On top of that, we build a layer of skills that we call "mental strategies," which are really basic Buddhist principles of patience, compassion, beginner's mind, acceptance—those basic things that you need to develop in your life if you want not only a happier life, but also a life where you are more in tune with other people and where you can be more effective in your work.

Then the last layer of skills we help develop is specifically designed for the audience we are talking to and is about relating mindfulness to their work. For example, how can you use and how can you develop more focus and more insight in your way of answering and receiving email? How can you develop your mind to be more focused and be more clear and wise in your meetings? How do you do that when setting goals and priorities, when planning your time? So all those practices that we

have to do while we are at work, how can we utilize the power of training the mind and how can we train the mind while engaging in those activities?

Mandala: What kind of responses do you get from this, and have you seen changes within companies that have done your trainings?

Hougaard: The very short answer is yes, definitely, we've seen changes. Before the Potential Project started doing this work, I had been teaching meditation in Dharma centers and I had seen people coming in being very motivated and making good progress over a number of years. When we started going into organizations, I thought I would never experience the same kind of motivation and the same kind of progress. However, I was very surprised to see that the transformation actually went sometimes much faster. You go into a full department and they all together embark on this journey of developing a mind that is clearer, calmer, and more kind, and they actually do it during working hours. They start to change their work culture based on these principles. It is almost like a retreat because they are there for eight or ten hours every day. They make amazing progress fairly fast.

Mandala: I have seen articles critical of bringing mindfulness into corporate situations—basically, the concern is whether ethics and compassion are being left out of mindfulness instruction. I think there is a fear that mindfulness could be used by corporations to become more profitable at the expense of poor people and so forth. What are your thoughts about this?

Hougaard: I fully understand the criticism and the whole backlash against mindfulness. I have to be honest, I also sympathize with a large part of it. I don't want to play holy and say we do everything right, because honestly, I don't know what is right and what is not right. I have some good ideas and I have been checking with my teachers. I think one of the problems with the very secular mindfulness that we see nowadays is that it is a very, very watered down, stripped down version of the Dharma. I wouldn't even call it Dharma. It is really a psychological approach to the suffering of samsara, that is, how can you alleviate a bit of distress that you are experiencing. Whether it is unethical or not, I don't know. If that is unethical, then neuro-linguistic programing and many other things are also unethical. I don't want to have a standpoint on that. From my point of view, coming from a Dharma background, merely alleviating distress is certainly not what we are interested in. We first of all take the actual practice very seriously. *Shamatha* is not for fun. *Shamatha* is a serious practice. It is hard work. *Lhak tong* practice, vipassana, is not always fun. It can be very painful. It can be very tough. We don't try to make it easier; we don't try to wrap it up in a way where it is easier than it is supposed to be.

I think there are two things that should always be there in mindfulness: one is the ethical component and the other one is the compassionate component. Without those two, I think you have lost the essence of mindfulness. Our presentation of mindfulness is coming from Buddhism. You can't take away from that, and you can't disregard all of the masters of the past that have said that mindfulness, ethics, and compassion go hand-in-hand. You can't have real mindfulness without having compassion. So it is a big part of our program, although not obviously. We don't tell our clients, "We teach compassion in our ethical program," because they would never engage with us. We tell them instead that we are coming with a mindfulness program that will make their

employees more effective, more calm, more kind, and then we introduce ideas of compassion once we're in the door.

Mandala: How do you introduce compassion within the corporate setting?

Hougaard: We work with American Express. We work with Microsoft. We work with Accenture. We work with really hardcore, performing, conservative organizations. How do we introduce compassion? We don't use the word "compassion"—that's the first thing. We just call it "kindness." Everyone can agree to kindness, but compassion is a little bit too fluffy for them.

We work with a global consultancy firm, the leading one in the world, in their Manhattan office in New York. When we had the sessions specifically on kindness, because they had been meditating for five to six weeks by then and because so many new seeds had been planted in their minds, they started seeing kindness as not just a nice idea, but something that would benefit themselves and others, and also as a foundation of their way of doing business. They understood that if they could have a real, kind, compassionate approach to their clients, their clients would probably be happier and also would buy more products from them. They suddenly saw a very virtuous circle: they develop good attitudes within themselves, they serve their clients better, and they receive more business, which is nice for them and nice for everyone, as long as the intention is right.

We find communicating these ideas astonishingly easy because human beings are good beings. We don't want to be evil and we don't want to suffer; we want to be happy and we want others to be happy as well. If we just provide the space where people can develop this, we find that it comes very much by itself, although we do help them a bit.

Mandala: Let's talk about email (laughs).

Hougaard: (laughs) Emails, yeah.

Mandala: For many people working in Dharma centers or organizations, I hear them talking about being overwhelmed by email. It's something I definitely experience. What kinds of ideas and strategies do you talk about in a Potential Project session concerning email? What is something that I can learn from you today about how to do email better?

Hougaard: This ties into your question about whether we present mindfulness in a traditional Dharma way or in a secular way. For this, I'll just give a completely, stripped down, secular approach to how can you better harness the potential of your mind in your way of dealing with email.

A fundamental aspect about email is that it is one of the biggest triggers of dopamine in your brain, which scientifically is a way of talking about what is called "attachment" from the Buddhist perspective. We have a strong attachment/aversion relationship with our email. We are very compelled to constantly check it. Most people check their email all the time. The downside of that is that it is stressful and it is very inefficient. You get more stressed because you don't get enough done. The mind, because of both aversion and attraction, just wants to check email all the time, which we end up doing. The more we do it, the more we get into the habit of doing it. And we get

more habitual in terms of attachment and aversion. That is not very useful, so we need to find strategies for pausing and distancing ourselves from this mind.

One is to not check email first thing in the morning. When you wake up in the morning and you have done your practice, you come into the office with an expansive, focused mind. If you started the day writing a very important article or doing another thing that really requires your clarity and focus of mind, you would be very well off. But many of us instead open our email program and immediately are bombarded with all the details and unresolved issues of yesterday; today becomes all the crap from yesterday, basically. Not checking email for the first fifteen minutes, maybe sixty minutes, maybe two hours in the morning is a very smart strategy.

Another one that is very important is not to have your email open all the time, because if it is open all the time, it will constantly remind you that there is something that could be triggering some dopamine in your brain. Close down all your digital communication for different periods of times throughout the day. Or, say that from 9 A.M. to 10 A.M. and from 2 P.M. and 3 P.M. are the times when I will be checking my email, and no times else. Those are very basic things. Also, switch off all your alerts, all the bells and whistles and all the notifications. There are many small, very practical things you can do whereby you'll be more focused and less stressed and actually have a more equanimous, balanced mind because you are not driven by that rush of reading new things all the time.

Mandala: Have you seen the results of that with some of your clients? Could you talk about that a little bit, because it seems very difficult to imagine in a certain sense.

Hougaard: As a disclaimer: people may think that I'm just sitting around in a nice Buddhist setting, that because I come from a Buddhist background I must be a hippie from Denmark, the world's happiest country. But the Potential Project is an organization with 140 people now. We are in twenty countries. We are very, very busy. I travel all the time. This advice is not coming from someone who is having a very easygoing work life. It can be quite tough, actually.

So what have our clients done? I can give a few examples. Carlsberg, a Danish brewer, with whom we worked with over a year implementing this mindfulness program in their entire organization, ended up switching off their email servers at 6 P.M. and reopening them at 6 A.M. They switched off email activities for twelve hours every day for the reason that they didn't want people to be spammed with emails into the night instead of being home with their families.

A large insurance company decided on email-free Wednesdays. On Wednesdays, no internal email simply allowed employees to be able to have quality time together and to be able to focus on the important things rather than on a constant stream of email all the time. We see many interesting initiatives to basically develop a more calm and mindful way of working rather than just perpetuating the habit that we are all in nowadays.

Mandala: How does someone get involved with the Potential Project? Is there a path to becoming a trainer?

Hougaard: There certainly there is. You can go on our website and find the "Want to join?" section. There is an application form. We do have quite a few FPMT folks within our organization. Having said that, we have found that it is not enough for people to have a good Dharma background. People also need to have a good meditation background, which is not always the case for everyone having a Dharma background. It is also very important that they have a deep experience of what work life is like in a large organization because we have found that if you don't have that, you can't really relate to the reality that people are facing. People can easily perceive you as a little bit flaky and it is not very well received, just as if you were bringing a real business man to talk in a Dharma center. Dharma students maybe wouldn't relate so well to it because they would rather see a trained Dharma teacher. If you go into an organization, you need to have a corporate appeal that will help them see that you really understand their world.

One thing that is important for me to emphasize is that the work that we are doing could never have been possible without FPMT and without many great Dharma teachers, the real Dharma teachers that have been supporting this for many years, maintain our integrity, keeping the messages really clear that it is Dharma and not just a new psychological model or well-being approach. We touched or reached 25,000 people last year. It is *only* due to the kindness of all the great teachers of FPMT and other organizations.

11. Dr. Anne Carolyn Klein: The Transmission of Tibetan Buddhism to the West

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Dr. Anne Carolyn Klein (Lama Rigzin Drolma) has a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the University of Virginia and is a professor of religion at Rice University in Houston, Texas, US. She has studied and practiced Dharma since 1970, mainly in the Gelug and Nyingma traditions. Her published books include Unbounded Wholeness: Dzogchen, Bon and the Logic of the Nonconceptual; Meeting the Great Bliss Queen; Knowledge and Liberation; *and* Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse: A Story of Transmission. *Dr. Klein teaches internationally, and she and her husband, Dr. Harvey Aronson (Lama Namgyal Dorje), are the founding spiritual directors of Dawn Mountain Tibetan Buddhist Center.*

Klein spoke with Mandala *associate editor Donna Lynn Brown.*

Mandala: What is transmission?

Klein: Transmission takes place in every communication. What is transmitted? Words, of course, but also modulations of sound, as well as body language, energy and feeling-tone. Transmission is everything that passes between people. There's no need to fetishize this: it is not something strange, it is the richness of communication that happens all the time. "I always feel good after talking to her," we say. It's not just words—it's everything that is received in relating with that person.

In Tibetan Buddhism, transmission connects us to a lineage of spiritual succession, as well as blessings, meditative ritual, artistic forms, and ways of teaching. How? By listening to a text read aloud by someone who earlier received it, in a line back to the text's originator. What is transmitted includes, but goes beyond, intellect, and is conducive to a profound integration of the text and its practices. There's information coming through, as well as traditional patterns of knowing. There's meaning, sound, and "waves of splendor" or blessings (Tib. '*jin-lab*). Equally significant is connection. There is no chasm between the devoted student and the caring teacher, between beginner's mind and mature wisdom. Their meeting requires that the teacher have something to offer and the student a capacity to receive. This ability to receive—emotionally, somatically, cognitively, and contemplatively—is not a small thing. That's why many classic texts, such as *Words of My Perfect Teacher* and *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, begin with how to listen and how to relate to a teacher. Relationship is crucial to transmission.

Transmission is best when there is trust and commitment as part of a compassionate holding. Buddha asked the grieving Kisa Gotami, whose child had just died, to request salt from a household that hadn't known death. She trusted him and followed his counsel. Buddha did not say, "This will help." It was implicit. Transmission, being profoundly relational, is not just words or technique. It is a student attuning to the pitch of a master singer, not a radio blasting into space.

One central Tibetan practice is guru yoga, which cultivates a heightened receptivity, fostered by love and trust, which makes the relationship a portal to an experience beyond the student's current capacity. The teacher, for a moment, de-occludes you. It may take years or even lifetimes before you can access this experience on your own. It radically alters your relationship to your own potential. You see it and believe in it. That is the power of transmission. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives an Avalokiteshvara initiation, maybe your heart softens. That is the core of transmission.

Mandala: As Tibetan Buddhism gets transmitted to the West, is it being secularized?

Klein: There is both conscious and unconscious secularization. There are serious exchanges between Buddhism and science, a conversation fraught with challenges but also tremendously promising. Geshe Thupten Jinpa's book, *A Fearless Heart*, is a conscious secularization of compassion. Buddhism is having significant cultural impact via mindfulness and compassion training in schools, workplaces, and among the public. The aim is not enlightenment or advancing Buddhism, but relieving stress, fostering positive relationships, and bringing values or skills to a broad cohort of people so they lead better lives. I think that's what His Holiness, as a bodhisattva, is hoping for. Bodhisattvas, Shantideva writes, though intent on nirvana for all, are pleased to offer whatever happiness they can to others in the meantime.

Unconscious secularization occurs when we use Buddhism to support, rather than challenge, our neuroses!

Mandala: What about Tibetan Buddhism in its more traditional forms?

Klein: The transmission of traditional practices, using the ancient forms of recitation, sadhana, study and retreat, is also occurring in many centers in the West. Does this mean that we are doing the same practices as Tibetans of old? Hardly. We can't help but practice as Westerners. And our own understandings of body, mind, and the social order impact what we need from practice and how we do it. We will have to use our own cultural intelligence to make traditional practices meaningful and transformative, not mere replicas of how they were done in Tibet.

Professor David Germano said to me recently that Buddhism didn't really land in Tibet from India until the Tibetans made it their own. Buddhism is not a box you ship from one place to another without the contents shifting. As Indian Buddhism became Tibetan Buddhism, so the Tibetan Buddhism that comes West will become Western Tibetan Buddhism. It is significant that the tragedy of Tibet dovetailed with the digital age. There has never in history been a cultural transfer as rapid as this one: enormous bodies of literature coming into our languages at unprecedented speed. It took the Tibetans 400 years to digest the Indian material. Today, *84,000* is on track to translate the entire Tibetan canon into a handful of languages in a hundred years. So there's a rapid cultural transfer, at least of texts. Training people, that takes longer.

Mandala: What would you say about the quality of practice in the West?

Klein: Quality is hard to assess. It's challenging anywhere to really develop as a practitioner. And when you've got something that's culturally different, maybe you just disappear into another

cultural form without really dealing with your inner challenges. I think this happens in the West. At the same time, I do know many practitioners who are genuinely developing. You know, we have two faces: our intrinsic nature and our reactive patterns, the bad habits of the psyche. Effective practice mirrors both—gradually revealing our nature, while, at the same time, clarifying what obstructs it.

For Westerners, working with emotions is important. Tibetans don't seem to build an identity around emotions, or even identify them as a category, as we do. So the transmission of a transformative path to the West has this added challenge. We can memorize the texts, translate them, even do practice every day, but is it really impacting how we feel and live? How can it, unless we are in touch with our emotions? They have to be dealt with, whether on the cushion or in therapy. Sometimes people come to Buddhism for things that therapy could do better.

Mandala: Are the lineages rooted here yet?

Klein: If "rooted" means that Western teachers educated by their Western teachers are giving the classic threesome of initiation, transmission, and instruction in deeply affective processes, we are not there yet. My generation studied with teachers who grew up in Tibet. Now there's a generation who are studying with Western teachers or more westernized Tibetans. Nevertheless, even younger Western teachers continue to be trained by Tibetans. Collaboration between Western and Tibetan teachers will be important in rooting Tibetan practice in the West, so the level and ongoing availability of traditional Tibetan education in Asia matters. As well, there are still countless texts to be translated, and oral commentary related to them to be digested. Language skills thus remain important. The more the people who run Western Dharma centers think about how this will work in coming decades, the better. It takes a lot to train somebody even to be able to invite Tibetan teachers, create a meaningful sequence of teachings, and sustain the necessary variety of practices in community. Still, many things are going well. Good Western teachers and Western-Tibetan partnerships are appearing. Maybe partnership is what Western Tibetan Buddhism will look like for a while. And at some point, there hopefully will be full lineage transmissions getting passed on by Western teachers to Western students.

Mandala: We assume Tibetan teachers will be with us for generations, don't we?

Klein: Perhaps. But the level of study now is not the same as it was in Tibet or India. Can't be. Fortunately the institutions are still producing powerful teachers, some of whom now visit or live in the West. And there are a few places in Tibet where people still devote their lives to practice in something like the old way. It is important that we support the growth of places of study in Asia for nuns, monks, and tantrikas. But we can't assume this resource will always be there.

Mandala: The West's Judeo-Christian outlook has given way to what some call a "broken worldview": secular, materialistic, and lacking in meaning. Can Tibetan Buddhism re-enchant the West?

Klein: We can't adopt Tibetan worldviews wholesale. But yes, Tibetan Buddhism can play a role. Most of us long for a holistic or sacred outlook: it was part of our culture in medieval times, and it speaks to a genuine human need. The danger is that, because we have such longing, we might over-

idealize all things Tibetan. Let's find a middle way by discovering contemporary ways of acknowledging our profound connection to the elements of earth and space, and to each other. That's a very human and humane way to live. Whether or not there are protector beings or protective laws, aren't the plants in the Amazon and the coral reefs off Australia worthy of protection? Isn't everything? Materialism is so limited. We humans thrive on feeling part of a sacred whole. And though Tibet may be the inspiration, we need to express the sacred in ways meaningful to us, here and now.

Mandala: Is it harmful to mix our inherited traditions with Buddhism to create rituals and celebrations? I'm thinking of weddings, Christmas, Passover ….

Klein: Rituals, celebrations, even some practices: people are mixing. We can't stop them. Whether it's harmful or "creative integration" may be in the eye of the beholder. If I am Buddhist and I like a Christmas tree because that's how I grew up, does that make me less Buddhist? No. Does practicing mindfulness or *tonglen* make me less Christian? No. In Asia, it's quite common to belong to multiple traditions. Famously, in Japan, you're born with Shinto rituals, you marry with Christian ones, and you die with Buddhist ones. In Tibet, Bön formed the bedrock of Buddhist expression and shaped it in important ways. In China, people didn't give up Confucianism, they honored their ancestors, but they were Buddhist and most of them were Taoist too. In Nepal, I've seen people muttering mantras while tossing flower petals at Hindu and Buddhist statues. Here at home, friends at our center have designed beautiful weddings that draw on both Christian and Buddhist expression. Some types of mixing could be a problem but some are useful, even necessary.

Mandala: Are ethics being transmitted? I've heard Buddhists brush off wrong behavior as empty, for example, which seems like a misunderstanding of both ethics and emptiness.

Klein: That's just crazy. And crazy-making. It's bad philosophy too. Yes, everything is empty, but everything also has to be dealt with. If someone is suffering due to abusive or predatory behavior, and someone else says, well, it's empty, that's ethically irresponsible and emotionally harmful. It's not particularly Buddhist either. It's just being blind. My own teachers have been generous and supportive, so I have personally not had negative experiences, but I certainly hear about them. Some Tibetans, like many Western men in authority, may not understand what it means for a woman to be oppressed in one way or another. Since Tibetan monastics are typically raised with a completely male point of view, gender can be a flashpoint for cultural misunderstanding.

In Buddhism, everything rides on "the legs of ethics." Guru Rinpoche famously said, "My view is as vast as space, but my conduct is as careful and precise as grains of barley." So view is never an excuse for bad behavior. But Dharma centers have to survive, so we give teachings that attract people. That's a secularizing force in itself! Westerners like using their minds, so wisdom is a popular topic. So is compassion because we're messed up about relationships. Nobody will come to a lecture on ethics. But ethics include behavior supportive of community in every sense. So if we teach kindness or compassion, we are teaching ethics.

For my own teachers, who were not marketing to Westerners, ethics were tremendously important, the ground of everything.

Mandala: Let's talk about the role of the body in transmission, which is sometimes hard to understand.

Klein: Transmission depends on receptivity. Once, from my seat at a Kalachakra initiation, I could see His Holiness the Dalai Lama in profile. Before beginning the ceremony, he sat with his back to the audience and prayed. His face and his entire bearing showed how totally, selflessly, he was absorbed in his prayer. I was so moved: it gave me something to aspire to. Or I see the humility of a teacher bowing before a Buddha statue, and I realize I don't bow like that … and maybe, in that moment, I see the dropping of ordinary mind and know that it's possible. Opening that kind of portal is the whole point. Think of His Holiness giving an Avalokiteshvara empowerment. That transmission occurs in part at a level below consciousness, because of subtle energies held by the body. Who he is, and the attunement, receptivity, and connectedness of the recipients—that's what makes it happen.

Mandala: Is there something about the body in practice that we're not getting?

Klein: Yes, and this can be an obstacle to transmission in the West. For Tibetans, mind is not as different from body as for us; they are fully integrated. Longchenpa said that wisdom pervades the entire body! This is a big gap between cultures. Years ago, I was not in my body at all; I thought being smart was all that mattered (laughs). It took me until I went to Tibet for the first time to understand this. But there it was clear, even to me: you have to be in your body. You can't just space out on a mountain. Tibetans—and traditional peoples everywhere—are more experientially in contact with their bodies than us. When Tibetans teach practices like Vajrasattva, they never tell us that this is an embodied experience. Nobody ever told me that. But you can't feel impacted unless you are in your body. For them, it's too obvious to be stated. Tibetans, at least the generation I studied with, don't take into account how "disembodiedly" intellectual we can be. But mind rides on energy, and energy is in the body. When practice is deep, you feel differently in your body. Even so, if nobody tells you that somatic sensing is important, you can just stay in your head forever. When people practice visualizations for years without much impact, I think it's often due to their lack of relationship to the body and the emotions we hold there. Being unconnected to the body and emotions—that's where most hiccups in transmission occur, I think.

Mandala: You studied with Gelug, Nyingma, and Bön lamas. How did you negotiate those allegiances?

Klein: For years I studied in the Gelug tradition, but then Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche came to Virginia and talked about Dzogchen—and I was irrevocably inspired. There was no way I wasn't going to seek that out. Then in India I had an audience with His Holiness, and he said it was OK—after all, he was doing it. (Laughs) Later I found out that one of my greatest Gelugpa teachers had secretly studied with Dudjom Rinpoche. So there's always been crossover. One teacher I was close to made it clear that when I got teachings from a different sect, I should not come back and disrupt his other students' focus. As long as I didn't do that and was open with him in private,

then it was OK; in fact he blessed me warmly in a way that totally comforted my heart. So it can be sticky, but Tibetans have always done it.

Mandala: Any final words on transmission?

Klein: Transmission requires an open heart, a softening of defenses. This is *dad-pa* in Tibetan, which I like to translate as "open-hearted devotion." Many people translate it as "faith," but it does not mean believing something. No teacher has ever asked me what I believed! *Dad-pa* means being delighted by the Dharma to the point of irrevocable open-hearted devotion. The late psychologist Emmanuel Ghent talked about a surrender that is not a defeat, but a quality of liberation and expansion of the self based on letting down defensive barriers. That's it. And that is an embodied state, not a belief system. It is a way of experiencing with our entire being. And it's what we need to be receptive to the transmission of both compassion and wisdom. That's not well understood in the West. People say, "I got transmission!" but sometimes that's just projection. You have to be in your body. You have to be in your heart. You have to be settled and not crazy. *Dad-pa* is heart to heart relationship. It's love. You love your teacher, the teaching, reality, your true nature, everybody else who has the same true nature. Not love across a chasm, but love that is the field in which everything occurs. The whole path is about love. Transmission is about love. Really.

12. Dr. Elijah Ary:
The Significance of Biography

Mandala July–December 2015

Dr. Elijah Ary was born in 1972 to Western Buddhist parents in Montréal, Canada. At age eight, he was recognized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of Geshe Jatse, a respected scholar and practitioner from Sera Je Monastery in Tibet. Ary entered Sera Je Monastic University in South India at age 14 and studied there for six years. He then left the monastery to receive a Western education, which culminated in a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He now lives in Paris with his wife and teaches Buddhism and Tibetan religious history at several institutions. He is the author of Authorized Lives: Biography and the Early Formation of Geluk Identity.

Ary spoke with Mandala *managing editor Laura Miller.*

Ary: Biography really has to be situated in time. We already have an idea in the West of what biography means, what it means to write a biography. Tibetan biography, which in the West is often called "hagiography," is so rich and filled with pseudo-magical or mystical images and events that it's easy to pass it off as unimportant. A lot of Western scholars in the early years of academic Tibetan Buddhist study thought it was just a bunch of hokum, that there was no historical value to Tibetan biography whatsoever. It can be seen as just devotional text. Sometimes, it's taken very literally. In Jan Willis' work in biography, she talks about the different levels of biography and the different uses, but more in a practice-oriented way. On one level you're getting historical information. On another level, it's more practice information. Then there's one level that is the real secret crux of the biography that only true initiates can really understand.

Mandala: Do you think biographies of great Tibetan scholars are relevant to Western Dharma students?

Ary: I think it's important to understand the historical development of the traditions that we follow. Studying about the history of the Gelugpa school has been immensely helpful for me in understanding how things came to be the way they are. One thing that I try to stress in my book is that one of the things that comes across through studying the different biographical traditions of these different masters is that there are shifts in the figurations. What we have now as a figuration of Tsongkhapa and even of Khedrup are often amalgamations of different biographical traditions that eventually come together and become one tradition. It can be important to understand that. I think it can at least nuance a little bit the way we revere these masters.

For example, one of the things that I say in the book is that in the earliest biographies Tsongkhapa is pretty much never—or next to never—depicted as an emanation of Manjushri. The vast majority of old biographies that we still have available portray him as having been mentored by Manjushri, but not having been an emanation of the deity Manjushri himself. Today, we have both of these traditions together in one figuration. I'm not saying that Tsongkhapa is *not* an emanation—I can't say that he is or he isn't—I do not have that insight, I'm not that spiritually advanced.

I find it interesting to look at this and realize this is a tradition that has developed over time. There are going to be changes and that's kind of normal. That's one of the things that I try to stress when talking about my book *Authorized Lives*. I'm not trying to denigrate or discredit the tradition that I'm from. I'm just saying that these are things that are important to look at. Academia has allowed me, at least, to look at these important historical shifts. I'm looking at a time frame of the Gelugpa school that, up until recently, not many people have looked at. The early Gelugpa school was not really a hot topic in academia when I was writing my dissertation.

Mandala: I think there are a lot of complexities when it comes to Tibetan Buddhism's dissemination in Western culture because there is so much Tibetan culture tied up in it. But now we have our Western lives in the 21st century and the conditions are different. I think His Holiness the Karmapa is being quite upfront right now in the United States talking about gender equality. It seems like it's helpful to understand the historical context when trying to decide what things we should keep from Tibetan Buddhism. From my point of view, having that historical context is illuminating. Have you thought of it in those terms?

Ary: I definitely agree that it can be very helpful. Context is important. I find that by having the context, it allows me to know and understand why I choose to practice something. If I choose to follow a specific direction or follow a specific teaching, if I understand the context, it allows me to understand it better. It allows me to really choose, in that sense, if I do or don't want to follow it.

It's wonderful what His Holiness the Karmapa is doing in bringing up matters of gender equality. This is possible because of this modern context. These are issues that perhaps weren't taken so seriously before, but because Buddhism now—at least Tibetan Buddhism—is disseminating in the United States and North America and pretty much all over the world, these are issues that are important to the context in which it is being disseminated. Because of that, they are issues that the tradition is going to have to tackle.

I find that if you understand where you're coming from, it's easier to know where you're going. For me, it was very helpful. When someone says Tsongkhapa was an emanation of Manjushri, I ask myself, what does that mean? What does that mean historically? How is that going to affect the way we practice? Once again, I'm not saying that he wasn't. I'm just saying that the idea of him being an emanation of a divine being developed over time.

This is my personal perspective and it's been helpful in understanding how truly insightful Tsongkhapa's works really are. He's so insightful that people were saying about him and continue to say about him that he was an emanation of Manjushri! Maybe it's just my academic side taking over and trying to nitpick and look at things under a microscope a little bit, but I find that when you have context, things become clearer. That's actually what I teach my students on a regular basis: whatever texts you have, if you understand the context, you can understand why they were saying things in that way, even though those things no longer apply today because the context has shifted.

To be honest, I don't know how much my book is going to be of help or hindrance to Western Dharma practitioners. I think oftentimes it seems that only academics read academic writing, or at

least, that academics are the ones who are mainly reading this type of writing. But, it's my contribution to understanding better the history of the development of the Gelugpa tradition.

Mandala: I do think there's a certain type of Western Dharma student that has this intellectual mind that likes this kind of study. Being a convert to Tibetan Buddhism, I have an idea of myself that is influenced by scientific materialism and rationality. I'm educated and want to see myself as making well-reasoned choices. So this kind of information supports my own faith and helps me feel like I am making a well-informed choice, which is also part and parcel of Buddhist practice.

Ary: Yes, that's just it! As Buddhists, we're meant to question things, we're expected to question what's being put in front of us, what's being presented to us. I think it's important to follow in that and to continue to question. I know that the book is probably going to have mixed reviews. One Tibetan studies scholar has already expressed his concern and basically told me to open my heart and let Tsongkhapa in. I thought that was very funny.

I kind of expect people to say, "Maybe you're not looking at this aspect or you're not looking at that," and I actually welcome that criticism because, so far, pretty much all of my sources push in one direction and I find that interesting. I welcome it when people tell me otherwise.

So far, most of the feedback I have received has been extremely positive and I'm very touched by this. Even the person who told me to let Tsongkhapa into my heart, I think even that was said somewhat in jest.

Mandala: I'm wondering about the monks who are studying at Sera Je now. How does your work relate to their lives?

Ary: To be honest, I don't know. If they read my book, I'll be very interested to hear their reactions. I've had some debate with one or two of my old teachers about what I'm saying in the book. We discussed it years ago and one said, "No, this can't be, you're misreading it or you're interpreting it wrong." I said, "Okay, but in this text it says that too, and then in this text as well, and that text as well. So if all of these texts are saying the same thing, then how am I to interpret it differently?" But with that being said, one of my old teachers helped me quite a bit in understanding certain passages of what I was reading.

One geshe at Sera Je, Geshe Tsultrim Chöphel, was extremely open minded about my work. We discussed it quite a bit and he seemed to find it fascinating. I find that really encouraging. He hasn't read my book. He hasn't read anything that I wrote because his English isn't that good to read that kind of writing, but I explained it to him. It was encouraging to talk with someone like that who is an authority for studies at Sera Je, yet who is very open minded, naturally curious about the topic, and was very welcoming.

13. Geshe Thupten Jinpa: Secularizing Compassion

Mandala Online December 2015

Geshe Thupten Jinpa, born in Tibet in 1958, and received a lharampa geshe degree from Ganden Monastic University in India as well as a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge in England. In addition to having been His Holiness the Dalai Lama's principal English translator since 1985, he is president of the Library of Tibetan Classics, *adjunct professor at McGill University in Montréal, Canada, and chairman of the* Mind and Life Institute.

Jinpa talked with Mandala *managing editor Laura Miller about his 2015 book,* A Fearless Heart: How the Courage to Be Compassionate Can Transform Our Lives.

Mandala: Congratulations on your book coming out. Would you give us a synopsis?

Jinpa: Thank you. The book is divided into three parts. Part one is making the case for why compassion matters and driving home the key point that compassion is part of our natural human instinct. The seed of compassion is in all of us and, increasingly, scientific research coming from different disciplines is pointing to the fundamental truth that compassion and instinct for empathy are inborn. These are innate; these are not something that we have culturally acquired or learned from some kind of socialization. I refer to some of the very interesting studies of very, very early childhood and the display of children of a much stronger preference towards helping behavior versus hindering behavior. Also, I make the point that given that compassion is part of our natural instinct, it also often plays a powerful role in motivating us to act in a particular way. And therefore, if it is possible for us, as much as possible, to somehow cultivate that and learn to make it a more active force in our everyday life, ultimately it is in the *self-interest* of the person himself or herself.

This is, I suppose, a self-interest argument for the value of compassion. I show that numerous studies demonstrate how compassion and happiness are closely related. In fact, I refer to compassion as the best kept secret of happiness. This begs the question: if it is natural and if it is so good for us, why don't we do it more? I bring in and discuss what hinders us from expressing our more compassionate parts—fear and pride, particularly the fear and anxiety that we bring into our relationships with others.

The second part, which is actually quite large, presents the key steps in Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT), a particular program that I helped develop at Stanford University when I was a visiting scholar, which has now been delivered and offered to so many people. We have trained and certified over 100 instructors formally. It has now been used as an intervention program to help treat veterans suffering from PTSD, and there is a private healthcare group in San Diego with 20,000 employees, which has about eight people who have been trained in CCT who are now offering this as part of human resources.

I present the key steps of these CCT practices, but also place each of them within a larger psychological context, which combines both classical Buddhist psychology as well as contemporary neuroscience and contemporary psychology. For example, for the intention setting practice, that chapter has a whole discussion of how we understand intention. What is the relationship between intention and motivation? What is the latest scientific theory on motivation and how does that relate to our perception of the world?

The final part of the book is about how all of this translates into our individual, everyday life. What does it mean to live a compassionate life on a day-to-day basis? I make the point that through cultivation we can transform compassion from a natural response triggered by a situation in front of us, to a more proactive standpoint from which we can relate to the world, a mental perspective. And then ultimately, one of the highest developments is when compassion becomes so natural that it moves from mental perspective and becomes *a way of being*. I actually have a short section in the book presenting the six perfections—generosity, ethics, patience, joyous perseverance, concentration, and wisdom. This is, I say, the way in which the Buddhist tradition has envisioned what it means to live compassionately and behave compassionately on a day-to-day basis. Although this comes from the religious context of traditional Buddhism, the basic principles behind the six perfections have nothing religious about them.

In the final chapter, I envision how compassion will unfold in the larger world.

Mandala: What inspired you to write this book?

Jinpa: I have had the privilege to serve His Holiness for so long and I know that one of his main focuses is to promote an appreciation of basic human values. He calls it "secular ethics." His Holiness is deeply interested in promoting this way of understanding and exploring human experience, and appreciating the key defining characteristics of what makes us human beings. These are qualities of compassion, empathy, forgiveness, a sense of connection, appreciation of others and so on, which are fundamental values. One of the things that His Holiness does is to convey this without any connection to Buddhism or religion. And I have been very impressed and inspired by that line of thinking and work. It has made a tremendous difference in the larger world.

I think where I see my own personal role in this area is to, in one way or another, serve as a kind of cultural interpreter between traditional Tibetan classical culture and the modern West. In my work for His Holiness as an interpreter and also in my writings and translations, I see we are now living in a very exciting world where—thanks to globalization and coming into contact with so many different cultures—we have access to knowledge and insights that were traditionally beyond what was available before. In this kind of situation I believe that when we bring the best of Buddhist traditional knowledge together with the best of the contemporary scientific approach, there can be important mutual contributions.

My own work, particularly for the Library of Tibetan Classics, was more traditional translation work. And that I think is a very important step in the transmission of knowledge and insights from one tradition to another. Most of the major epochs in cultural transformation have come from

exposure to a different culture and translation work. In the case of Tibet, translation of classical Indian Buddhist texts completely reshaped the Tibetan tradition. I believe that translating many of the key classical Buddhist texts, especially Tibetan and Indian, will really shape modern sensibilities and modern value systems, including science.

I think in order for these ideas to impact contemporary culture in an effective way, there also needs to be a second-level interpretation. The second-level interpretation draws from the actual translated texts, but they are brought into the idiom and conceptual framework and the language of the host culture. When I translate texts, I am very faithful to the original because I am reproducing what existed in the original. But when I do the second-order interpretation, then my loyalty is really to the host culture, which is the English-speaking world. And in a way, this particular book, if you can call it "interpretation," would be at this second level.

Mandala: In the introduction to the book you include a quotation from His Holiness from a Mind and Life Institute meeting in India where His Holiness urges scientists to look into the positive qualities of the human mind, like compassion, that can be cultivated through contemplative practice with the idea that with scientific understanding, some of these practices can be offered to the world. What strikes me is how insightful and far-sighted this encouragement from His Holiness was. It seems that His Holiness has really been a catalyzing force. Can you share some of your thoughts of His Holiness' role in this and how it has influenced your work?

Jinpa: His Holiness said, after the establishment of the Mind and Life Institute in 1985 and the first conference in 1987, that it became very clear to him that something very important could come out of the meeting of these two investigative traditions—Buddhism and modern science. Both of them are interested in understanding the human condition. In the West, scientists focus more on the outside; in the East, the classical contemplative traditions have focused more on the inside. That is a crude but simple way of putting it. And it makes perfect logical sense to say that if we bring the best of these approaches, then we have a complete picture. That seems to be the basic impulse on the part of His Holiness and he has been, right from the beginning, an enthusiastic advocate for integrating knowledge.

As these conversations unfolded, it became evident that there are so many resources in the classical Buddhist tradition, particularly when it comes to mental processes. The interesting thing about the contrast between Buddhist psychology and contemporary Western psychology is that, until recently, contemporary Western psychology didn't really have much to say when it came to actual mind training. They are interested in understanding the phenomenon of mind, what are its mechanisms, why do certain people behave in a particular way. The focus has been very much on what goes wrong—on the pathology—because the model is medical. His Holiness realized that the focus in the West has been just on understanding the diseases and the pathology. The method that they are bringing is very rigorous because there is a systematic approach looking at the causal dynamics and their behavioral connections and so on. But, when it comes to recommendations on what can be done, there is a kind of a paucity in the Western approach.

In traditional Buddhist psychology, however, in addition to the tremendous depth of knowledge and understanding about how the mind works, there are also a lot of practices that are

recommended that individuals can do, such as practices for how to strengthen one's compassion; how to open one's heart; how to develop greater resilience; how to develop greater patience; how to learn to observe one's thoughts and emotions; how to regulate one's emotions when one gets worked up; how to develop this meta-level awareness, where one can step back and disengage and observe what is going on in the theater of one's mind. There are so many resources there and His Holiness basically felt that it makes no sense not to connect the two. Clearly, the Western scientific side could learn from the techniques that are there in the Buddhist traditions as well the insights in Buddhist psychology and science of mind.

That there could be potential offerings to the world from this connection, His Holiness has been prophetic. Look at the story of the "mindfulness movement." Of course, there is a lot of fad surrounding this, some of which is slightly excessive. But that doesn't preclude the fact that the mindfulness movement has truly made tremendous contributions in the clinical domain. For example, the prevention of a relapse of depression when mindfulness is added to cognitive behavioral therapy—there is tremendous data that shows its efficacy. The mindfulness movement has in some sense proven His Holiness' intuition that the meeting of the two traditions can really be very constructive. In fact, people like Professor Richard "Richie" Davidson, who is a pioneer in what is now called "contemplative science," when you ask them about the evolution of the emergence of contemplative science, will explicitly attribute it to His Holiness and to his remarks at that particular Mind and Life conference, where he asked scientists to use their tools to look at the positive side of the human mind and see if some of the classical techniques actually work, and then adapt and offer them to the world.

Mandala: It seems that the popularity of mindfulness has opened the gates for compassion training. Would you talk about that?

Jinpa: I think one of the advantages of mindfulness language is that it is value neutral. That is why it is much more palatable and acceptable in a culturally secular environment, especially in the United States where there is an almost dogmatic insistence on the separation of church and state. Mindfulness, because the language is about attention, present moment awareness, disengagement from habitual thought patterns, observing what goes on in your experience, and becoming more aware of your own body sensations and so on, is value neutral, and the concept is not that difficult to understand. It is difficult to experience it because we do not come into the world naturally gifted with mindfulness; it is something we need to cultivate. However, the concept itself is not that difficult, and that's why there's much less resistance in terms of receptivity to mindfulness.

People who've engaged with mindfulness have the ability to naturally experience what it feels like to be in a calmer state of mind, to be in a more focused state of mind. It allows for deeper qualities of mind; you can get a taste, and that is why it much easier to understand. Something like compassion is much more complicated because compassion also has a strong emotional component. Also, historically, the word "compassion" has belonged to the value side of language and has been seen as being part of the religious value system, which creates some cultural resistance on the part of some individuals. Now it's changing because science is increasingly showing us that compassion is an inherent part of who we are as social creatures. It has nothing to do with religion; it is part of who we are as human beings. I think any resistance to compassion

that arises from thinking that it is a religious value only is disappearing. It's His Holiness to whom we should really give the credit because His Holiness has been saying for over forty years across the world that compassion is a natural human quality. Although historically it may have been the religious traditions that have promoted compassion, in itself, compassion is independent of religion. He has been a very strong voice advocating that and people are beginning to listen.

Mandala: Can you describe the work being done at Stanford University on compassion training?

Jinpa: My work at Stanford began in the winter of 2007. In 2005 there was an important conference on depression, craving, and suffering, where His Holiness interacted with a group of researchers and scientists at Stanford University. It was truly inspiring for a lot of researchers and clinicians who were there who had never thought something like this could potentially be of interest to the researchers in the clinical community. This led to a conversation within the core group of scientists at Stanford School of Medicine that here was something that had real potential. A neuroscientist by the name of Jim Doty, who attended the conference and is now a faculty member of Stanford, had an endowed a chair in the neurosurgery department and set aside some funds to explore the possibility of setting up a kind of a permanent center there. He invited me to be part of the founding group and once I had a conversation with him, I was convinced that there was a real potential.

At that time, although there were individual researchers doing scientific studies of compassion, it wasn't really accepted as part of the legitimate field of scientific inquiry. One of the early works that Jim and I did was to use Stanford's name and power to convene people from many different universities and different fields—neuroscientists, clinical scientists, basic researchers, psychologists, child developmental psychologists, including Christian theologians and Buddhist scholars—to our first conference that looked at how we are defining compassion. That was very, very successful. In fact, one senior Stanford psychology professor, who was actually a real skeptic, came up to me on the second day and said, "I have to admit I was wrong." They were genuinely impressed. Then we did another conference focusing on the measures of compassion. We had another one that explored the language of mental life. These were all attempts to bring people together from so many different backgrounds. People like Barbara Fredrickson, who studies loving-kindness' effect on the vagus nerve; Kristin Neff, whose work has primarily been on self-compassion; and Paul Gilbert, who is a pioneer in developing compassion-based therapy dealing with people who have pathologically high shame, were there and so on and so forth. We had Richie Davidson, who is a pioneer in this whole area. At the last conference I attended, at Telluride and organized by Stanford, I was one of the main speakers. I was so happy because out of fifty to sixty speakers, about 80 percent of them were completely unknown to me, which means the field is opening up. Instead of feeling depressed that I didn't know the majority of speakers, I took it as a cause for celebration because this means that now compassion is becoming mainstream.

While I was a visiting scholar at Stanford, I thought that there was a fantastic opportunity for me to develop a secular compassion training program, taking inspiration from MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction). I developed an eight-week compassion training program. Although the initial program was developed by myself and was tested out on Stanford undergraduates, it soon became clear that the program could benefit a lot from adding on other approaches coming from

contemporary Western therapeutic traditions like Steven Hayes' acceptance and commitment therapy and Marshall Rosenberg's nonviolent communication, which has some very powerful tools, like how to distinguish between the language of observation that talks about the pure facts, and the language of judgement, where we bring in our interpretation of the situation. I think this is a powerful way of becoming more aware of how much judgement we bring into describing a situation because you do it by learning the language, which is in some ways more practical and easier than trying to imagine what to do, which is the meditation-style approach. I also spent several long weekends together with a team of local experts—Kelly McGonigal; Erica Rosenburg, an emotions researcher and student of Paul Eckman; and Margaret Cullen, who is MBSR trained and a family therapist—coming up with exercises. In the end, the final instructors' manual that we came up with, which is the actual protocol, has a very strong interactive component. I really feel happy that I had the opportunity and space to do this.

Mandala: And who is the training aimed for? Is it for anyone?

Jinpa: When I was developing this program I was very clear that we shouldn't keep in mind any specific target constituencies. As much as possible, it should be a generic program that could be offered to adults. My understanding is that later on we could use this as a basis to develop special adaptations for specific needs, whether for pain management, stress relief, or whatever. I really wanted to have a very generic program that could benefit ordinary people.

Mandala: In chapter 1 of your book you include a short quote from the American children's television producer Fred Rogers: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" This quote resonated for me in the days after the earthquake in Nepal. I feel like this ability to look for those people and to rejoice in the compassion arising has helped me to not despair for what is a sad, sad situation in Nepal. So could you share a little bit more on that and how that works?

Jinpa: I think that often when we are confronted with tragedy and situations where we see other human beings doing horrible things to others, or when it's a natural disaster, it is very natural for us to get fixated on what is wrong. Biologically, we are programmed to detect threat and danger, and fear is such a dominant emotion because fear is a signal when something is a threat and you need to do something about it. Because of this, we get so fixated on the negative side of things.

On the other hand, if we're able to step back a little bit and also look at the positive side, every tragedy has some kind of silver lining. For example, you cite the current tragedy in Nepal with the earthquake. If we just fixate on the tragedy and the problem, and as we are not physically there, we feel powerless and also we feel depressed. Yes, the perception of the suffering is very important because that is what is going to pull our heartstrings, which is what is going to motivate us and move us. But at the same time, you are able to also notice good things, because in these kind of situations people help out and it brings out their best. Sometimes there are people who take advantage and loot—but this is what makes human society very interesting. For most people, tragedy brings out their best. What happened in New York on 9/11 is a typical example of how human beings have this ability to rise to the occasion. Sometimes we don't notice this, but I think being able to notice this is very good for us because we don't want to lose hope; when we give up,

then that's the end of story. If we are able to notice the good side, then it really energizes us and motivates us, and that is why I love that quote. I'd heard about this before but I never really gave it much thought. But during the Boston Marathon bombing, some of the newscasters talked about this and I thought "Yes!" I remembered it, and it is a powerful advice.

Mandala: Can you talk a bit more on this?

Jinpa: There are numerous practices that I present in the book. One of the things that people who have been completely unexposed to the Dharma, like a veterans' group in Palo Alto that received an expedited six-week training course, find powerful is the simple exercise of equanimity, recognizing that "Just like me, this person wants to be happy, this person does not want suffering" and learning to use it almost like a mantra. It's a very simple concept, but for a lot of people who struggle with outrage and short temper when they see someone being unfair, being able to just recall this phrase has been a powerful antidote restraining them.

One of the other things I suggest in the book is intention setting. Those who are brought up in the Buddhist world and those who have been exposed to Buddhism know that intention setting is such an important part of everything that we do. It's like setting the tone. And whatever tone you set colors what unfolds afterwards. But many people who are not exposed to this kind of idea don't think about it. For example, if you are running a meeting, if you set a clear intention right at the beginning (you don't even have to share it with your colleagues, you can do it mentally; it takes only a minute or half a minute) and said, "OK, I'm going to bring my best to this meeting; I'm going to give the benefit of the doubt to everybody and I will recognize that everybody who is making suggestions is going to be making them from the best part of their intention; I will acknowledge and honor them and I will do what is the most wise and compassionate thing to do here," just setting that intention completely changes the way you would respond and react to other people's opinions. You wouldn't take them as a threat or challenge to your views. Those kind of things I think are simple practices, but they have huge, huge implications.

Mandala: What is the role of Dharma centers in the development of secular compassion? Where do they fit in?

Jinpa: One of the things that His Holiness has expressed in his aspirations for Maitripa College is that in addition to teaching Buddhist studies, the college could teach something that is more universal and that people can utilize regardless of whatever affiliations they may have. I think FPMT is the largest Gelug association in the West and is the fruit of the beautiful vision of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. You have a tremendous network of sangha members, who have emotional connections with centers all over the world. I think its capacity for outreach is enormous; its presence is everywhere. Also, because of its longevity—FPMT has been in existence for now several decades—there is a depth of resources in terms of experienced people within the community. I would hope that some of the senior members of FPMT would take up this second-level translation that I was talking about earlier, catering to the needs of people who identify with Buddhism and need standard Dharma teachings, but at the same time have the ability and facility to offer this larger, more secular Dharma to people who are simply interested in finding more peace in their life and who are not particularly interested in having any religious affiliation; to

people who are looking for some ability to bring more peace into their life, focus more, relate to their family members and the world in a more compassionate way, have a more enriching life, and make their life meaningful and serve society in a meaningful way. That is a very deeply spiritual and legitimate aspiration.

I would hope that the FPMT would think about that because the people who are steeped in the traditional practice are in some ways the best teachers to bring general-level Dharma into more secular contexts with integrity and depth behind it. The only thing that you would need is a little bit of training in the language, because it is a different way of presenting the Dharma. But that is not a very demanding challenge. There are many people teaching mindfulness and so on, but the depth of their personal experience and realization is very shallow, whereas people come from the FPMT with many, many years of experience and practice, and have much greater depth. It's simply a matter of learning how to present it.

The majority of FPMT members are Western Dharma practitioners, so you don't have the problem of language. Tibetan teachers are much more used to doing traditional teachings and on top of that they have the problem of language. Their lack of proficiency in English precludes them from having a deeper appreciation of the cultural needs and the cultural sensibilities and nuances of the particular host culture—non-Tibetan FPMT members don't have that problem.

Mandala: There are a couple of FPMT centers right now that are beginning to develop projects in this field. One is Maitripa College, with their Mindfulness and Compassion Initiative. And another is Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Italy, which is developing a science academy. Very early days, but I was wondering, given your experience working at Stanford and with the Mind and Life Institute, what advice you can offer in terms of developing a project and taking it forward.

Jinpa: I think perhaps the most important thing is the sincerity of the motivation because when you have a sincere motivation, you are able to bring a clarity of vision. We are all imperfect human beings, so nobody can come up with a full vision of how things are going to unfold. But where we can make a difference is to ensure the purity of our intention, and also as much as possible, develop a clarity of a vision of what exactly we are trying to do. When these two things are clear, then it becomes a lot easier to actually initiate something. Whoever is in the leadership position needs to have a passionate belief in whatever project they are leading because passion is infectious and can inspire people working on the project as well as funders. It also attracts other people into the movement. If you look at many of the movements, most of them have been successful because there are one or two people who were completely passionate about it—they believed in it—and because of their passion, they are resilient, they don't get bogged down just because there are obstacles along the way.

Mandala: A different question. I'm very curious about what your thoughts are regarding Western high-level meditators with realizations— kind of Western yogis—is this something we should be aiming for, is it possible, and where might they fit into the development of Dharma in the West?

Jinpa: Yes, that is a very interesting question. There are now, because it has been several decades, high-level Western practitioners who have had high-level realizations. I personally know a few, so

there is nothing ethnically obstructing the attainment of these realizations; it really doesn't matter what ethnicity you come from. The question is how is it that the presence of these yogis hasn't really translated into the ability for these yogis to inspire people, be in leadership positions, and be great Dharma teachers. That, I think, is an interesting question. I think part of that has to do with the fact that the language of Dharma in English, and for that matter, in French and other languages, isn't fully settled yet. It is an ongoing process.

Also, I think in the West (although FPMT is an exception), there hasn't been enough institutional development to really allow the space for Western Dharma teachers to emerge and assume the authority that they deserve. I think this will come. I think it's probably just a matter of time.

What is very important is that when you have indigenous Western teachers come up, that they be genuine. Tibetans have had the Dharma for such a long time and Tibetan relationships between the guru and students are organic—gurus tend to emerge on the basis of their reputation as teachers and thus there are checks and balances. For example, gurus have attendants who really keep them in check—they are a bit like spouses, keeping you in check. These attendants are very close household members who act as a kind of check on the lama's behavior. There is very little room for a teacher to go on an ego trip.

In the West, the culture is very individualistic and it is a culture of celebrity—people love fame, people love exposure. There is a danger of someone being put on a pedestal and not having the strength to be able to remind themselves, "Yes, all of this is fine, but in the end, I am who I am." That kind of groundedness, down-to-earthness, is a quality that needs to be cultivated because in the Western context, generally there isn't this attendant-lama relationship and things may get out of balance. Also, the culture doesn't facilitate the development of grounded charismatic teachers. The only model we have are celebrities. Subconsciously, celebrity culture seeps in into peoples' relationships and those dynamics make it all very complicated. I think these are things the Western Dharma centers and cultures will have to gradually learn. I think it is a learning process.

Mandala: Is there anything that you would like to add, in particular to the FPMT audience?

Jinpa: I think the sense of belonging that the FPMT community has is important. That self-conscious identification with community is, I think, very important. That will increasingly—even from our own personal selfish point of view—guard students against loneliness and feeling left out and all the rest. In the West, I think we underestimate the importance of community because people are brought up to have very autonomous identities; that we should be relying on ourselves. A sense of community is important. FPMT members are fortunate because it is a large community, it has a long history, and Lama Zopa keeps in close touch with all the centers and there is a personal connection with him. I think that should be recognized and valued because there is a Tibetan saying: "When you have a jewel at home, you fail to appreciate its value."

14. Dr. Georges Dreyfus and Ven. Tenzin Namjong: Debate in Tibetan Buddhist Education

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Dr. Georges Dreyfus, born in 1950 in Switzerland, remains the only Westerner to have achieved the degree of lharampa geshe, the highest level of geshe in the Gelug scholastic tradition. He also has a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. He is the Jackson Professor of Religion at Williams College, Massachusetts, US, and has published The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: the Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk, *and* Recognizing Reality: Dharmakirti's Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations, *as well as numerous academic articles.*

FPMT's Massimo Corona discussed with Dreyfus the part that debate plays in the training of scholars in the Tibetan tradition.

Mandala: Many people believe that debate is a type of group discussion. But in your book, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*, you make clear that this is dialectical debate, which respects certain rules.

Dreyfus: Yes, in the book I explain the general procedures in the Tibetan Buddhist way of studying: on one hand, you study both your teacher's oral commentaries as well as the written commentaries of your tradition. That's the first part. The second part is debate, and in my experience it's pretty clear that the two go together to provide the full range of training.

By studying the commentaries, you receive the appropriate tradition. You are taught what the world is like, what the path is like, and so on. There is no question that you can learn by this method. But in order really to understand, you cannot just repeat what has been told to you. Western thinkers like Hans-Georg Gadamer say that to understand is to be able to question. You can learn things and you can repeat things, but as long as you are not able to raise questions you are little more than a parrot, just repeating what you've been taught. You must go further and question and raise doubts. This is the sign of mature understanding.

This can be very difficult, because there are no rules for questioning. When you are confronted with a statement, there is no way to tell where, and how, to question. It's a matter of insight—the person either recognizes that there is something questionable there or not. So mastering the art of debate provides the training and develops habits of thinking that allows us to question insightfully.

One person sets forth a number of teasers, and the second person tries to oblige the first person by contradicting him. Training in debate is really training in learning how to see the weak points in contradiction.

Mandala: The questioner points out, "If you continue to hold that position, it really means such and such, and that is an absurdity and an impossible consequence"…

Dreyfus: Debate in the Tibetan tradition proceeds mostly by consequences. The goal of the questioner is to oblige the defender to contradict himself or herself. If you practice this repeatedly, you will develop a frame of mind which looks for difficulties and weak points. In the Tibetan tradition, it is a very important frame of mind, which leads the student, ultimately, to the Madhyamaka view.

Mandala: I felt that my mind got sharper after I studied debate. Not only that—my ability to understand any type of reasoning increased. Is debate like yoga for the mind?

Dreyfus: Yes, it is a kind of discipline of the mind that aims to develop logical abilities. But also, importantly, it develops the ability to question, and for me, that is the most important thing because most of us have the tendency, when confronted by a text, a statement, and so on, either simply to accept it or to refute it out of hand because it contradicts our belief. That's not a very good attitude for understanding the Madhyamaka perspective.

When my first teacher, Geshe Rabten, taught me *lorig* [Buddhist psychology of the mind and its functions], he would ask me if I had any questions. I would only have questions of clarification. He told me, "When you have real doubts, that will be the time when you will be understanding. Right now, you are not really understanding. That's why you don't have any questions."

Mandala: Lama Yeshe was so happy when someone would raise a hand to ask a challenging question. He became bright and luminous.

Dreyfus: It's only when you challenge that you gain understanding; otherwise you are just a prisoner of what you are being taught. It never really becomes your own.

Mandala: Many people believe that Gelugpas are only interested in study rather than trying to come to a realization of the view that is free of discursive thought. Some masters in other traditions even say, "Kill the thought, kill the analysis, kill the concepts. These are your enemy." Is debate only practiced in the Gelug tradition?

Dreyfus: In all the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism—Sakya, Nyingma, and to a certain extent Kagyu—you will find a combination of study and meditative practice. It's true that Gelugpas are more intent on study, but the interesting difference between Gelug practitioners and those of the other schools is that Gelugpas tend to place more emphasis on debate whereas the other schools emphasize the study of commentaries. The idea that Gelugpas only study while the others only meditate is not true at all.

My own view is that everybody should do both.

There are two ways of looking at the view: one is called "looking for meditation through the view"—that is, first you study, then you meditate. The second is called "looking for the view through meditation"—that is, first you meditate, then you proceed experientially under the very close guidance of a teacher. These two ways exist in all the schools, although it is probably true that some schools, such as the Nyingma, put more emphasis on the latter.

Most of the important lamas, for example in the Nyingma school, have a great deal of scholastic training—Dudjom Rinpoche and Dilgo Kyentse Rinpoche are good examples of this. When I went to see them, they didn't say to me, "What you have studied is going to be an obstacle so you have to throw this away." Instead they said, "You have studied a lot so you are going to understand very easily."

People have to understand that these [study and non-conceptual meditation] are not incompatible. Obviously the conceptual view is only a preparation for attaining the real view, which is non-conceptual. Still, understanding things conceptually is a considerable help, and it leads to the non-conceptual.

Mandala: When you are at a certain level, then it is true that you should not have discursive thoughts, but this does not mean that on the path you eliminate discursive thoughts at all times. Compassion and love are discursive thoughts, after all, when you are contemplating bodhichitta.

Dreyfus: Not having discursive thoughts doesn't mean a whole lot by itself. In a state of good shamatha (calm abiding) you don't have any discursive thoughts, but this is not going to bring you to liberation. Liberation requires insight, and insight comes from an understanding, not just from leaving the mind empty. Debate prepares you for this kind of non-conceptual view in the sense that you explore all the possibilities of the conceptual domain, and then come to a correct non-conceptual understanding of emptiness.

Mandala: Which is a non-affirming negation. So through debate you are cutting through only the wrong things, and without positing anything, you arrive at understanding because anything else is impossible.

Dreyfus: His Holiness the Dalai Lama told me once, "Do you notice how in debate, when you say something that looks completely true and self-evident, there is always someone in the group who will do you in?" Precisely that. It brings you to the point in which conceptual thinking dissipates. Almost as if it burns it away.

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Ven. Tenzin Namjong (Matthew Pasion) was born in 1977 in Hawai'i, US and ordained in 2007. While in his tenth year of the geshe studies program at Sera Je Monastery in South India, Ven. Namjong spoke to Mandala *associate editor Donna Lynn Brown about the role of debate in his studies.*

Mandala: How did you first learn to debate?

Ven. Namjong: One of my housemates, a New Zealand monk named Jampa Chöpel, taught me the basics of debate. I had read the late Daniel Perdue's book—*Debate in Tibetan Buddhism*—but that's different from actually doing it. One conversation I remember … You know that objects of knowledge include permanent phenomena and impermanent phenomena, right? So my housemate asked me, "The subject 'object of knowledge' itself, is that permanent or impermanent?" I was stumped. I just sat there thinking. He said, "You can't just sit there pondering! Answer whatever you think." I said, "Well, OK, impermanent." And then he said,

"No, it's permanent." There is an axiom: if a phenomenon has both permanent and impermanent parts, it is permanent. Working with him like that is how I got up to speed.

I started going to debate and my Tibetan was not very good, but actually, I believe it improved more by going to debate than if I had just stayed home and studied.

Mandala: What is your schedule at Sera?

Ven. Namjong: The academic year is divided into so-called "on sessions" and "off sessions." During the "on sessions," there is debate in the morning from 9–11 A.M. and then again in the evening from 6–10 P.M. During the off session, there is no morning debate and in the evening, debate runs from 6–9 P.M. In the morning, before debate, and at night after debate, we memorize and recite texts. Reading textbooks and commentaries is usually done in in the afternoon, or after morning and evening memorization. On top of that, there are often pujas and group prayer sessions that start at 5:30 A.M. There aren't pujas every day, but sometimes there can be three or four. Each day, I try to do a bit of meditation and slowly go through the practices that Lama Zopa Rinpoche has given me, but the emphasis is on study. I heard that in Tibet, monks weren't allowed to take initiations or even go to a lamrim teachings until after they graduated. That has changed in India, but that mind-set of study being foremost is still there. When I tell people we're studying so long, up past midnight and waking up at five, they say, "What? That's a monastery? I thought monks were more peaceful." We're trying to radically transform the mind, and difficult circumstances allow for more growth and change. I try to remember that when I'm feeling, "Oh my gosh, this is so difficult." The geshe studies program lasts maybe twenty years, but samsara is beginningless—and if we don't do the work to gain liberation and enlightenment, it will also be endless!

Mandala: What role does debate play in your program?

Ven. Namjong: By far the main avenue of learning at Sera is debate. Some people are surprised to hear that we have only two or three hours of classes per week. But we debate several hours a day. As we advance, there is even less class time. Once you know how to study, you read a text and then settle your doubts on the debate courtyard rather than asking a teacher to tell you. It was a bit of a change for me to grasp that listening to the teacher is not so much to receive an answer as to get more questions, more doubts, so there is more to debate. That's part of the reason we have twenty years. For example, for some questions, I can see there are good reasons on both sides. So I'll debate these questions over and over, from both sides of the issue, not necessarily trying to come to one resolution—just experiencing all the arguments.

Mandala: Do you *like* debate?

Ven. Namjong: I don't know about always liking debate, but it's very beneficial for my mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasizes how we need to be 21st-century Buddhists: not merely relying on scriptural quotations, but using reasoning to establish the veracity of the teachings. He often quotes the *Tattvasamgraha*: "Like gold [that is acquired] upon being scorched, cut, and rubbed, my word is to be adopted by monks and scholars upon analyzing it well, not out of respect [for me]." Intense debate is the means by which we gain clarity about the teachings—particularly the four

noble truths, selflessness, and emptiness. And years of debating key scriptures and concepts generates conviction. Then this conviction creates tremendous energy for practice.

Mandala: How do you think debate leads you to knowledge and realization?

Ven. Namjong: All suffering comes from the mind, especially from distorted views about reality. If we discover the truth of reality, we can abandon the distorted views at the root of our suffering. Our senses are not accurate about hidden phenomena, and some of the key principles in the Buddha's teachings—impermanence, selflessness, emptiness, past and future lives, the four noble truths, and karma—are hidden phenomena. These have to be realized for the first time by a reasoning consciousness. The purpose of debate is to develop our reasoning skills so we can realize these. You can't just repeat, "All phenomena lack inherent existence, all phenomena lack inherent existence" and get a realization of emptiness! You have to see your own innate view and then use reasoning to discover what is really true.

Debate is analytic meditation in action. It isn't primarily about defeating an external opponent. Rather, we need to recognize and refute our mistaken ways of thinking using reasoning. The answer in and of itself is not that helpful if you haven't arrived at it through first identifying and then refuting the wrong view. The late Choden Rinpoche remarked that clapping the hands once on the debate courtyard (which is done every time a question is asked) has more benefit than three months of retreat. I think this is because studying and reflecting on the *Prajnaparamita* has so much benefit, as is explained in the sutras themselves. I have also heard that some past masters got their first realization of emptiness right in the middle of a debate, so the debate process definitely helps us to recognize and refute our wrong views, the most important one being the view grasping onto true existence.

Mandala: Can you describe how debates proceed?

Ven. Namjong: A debate starts with an invocation: "*Dhi, jitar chöchen*." "*Dhi*" is the seed syllable of Manjushri, the buddha of wisdom. One standard explanation is that this means, "Dhi: in just the way Manjushri investigated the subject."

There are two roles in a debate: the defender and the questioner. The defender has to put forth positions, and the questioner's job is to make the defender contradict himself or abandon his earlier positions by showing that they give rise to faults or undesirable consequences. The questioner does this by starting from the defender's thesis and then "throwing" a series of logical consequences that would seemingly follow from the earlier assertions. The questioner, appealing to scriptural passages, generally accepted tenets, and even common sense, tries to take these consequences to a point where the defender cannot maintain his position.

The questioner starts the debate. Often he gives a fragment of a quote. The defender has to then identify where in the root text, commentary, or textbook the passage is from, and supply the rest of it. He is then usually asked to reconstruct the outline of the text. At first, I was confused by the emphasis Tibetans place on learning outlines. Now, I see the utility: it provides a way to quickly run through the main points of the text. Listing the outlines is a scanning meditation on the whole text.

Usually, the initial quote will be illustrative of a larger point. For example, if we are debating about bodhichitta, the questioner may quote the *Abhisamayalamkara*: "Mind generation is the wish for compete enlightenment for the benefit of others." After the defender goes through the outline, the questioner will set the groundwork for the debate. One common way to do this is to ask the defender to posit the definitions and divisions of the topic. Then the questioner may try to determine the "limits of pervasion." A pervasion is a logical entailment: if "A" then necessarily "B." The questioner will ask for the pervasions of various phenomena: how they interrelate. Once a pervasion is agreed to, the questioner will try to find a counter-example to show the defender has erred; then the debate goes on.

Mandala: What is easy in debate? What is hard?

Ven. Namjong: The questioner has a lot of freedom to decide where the debate will go. Defending is more difficult because the questioner sets the agenda, so he can direct the debate to where he feels comfortable. The defender is at the mercy of the questions. But one good thing about being the defender is that, if you don't know the answer, you can just give one of the four responses and it is up to the questioner to prove the point. Sometimes, if you haven't studied so much that day, and you're asked a question you haven't really thought about, you can just answer however seems reasonable at that moment, and see what kind of logic, reasoning, and quotes the questioner has. Sometimes one day I'll answer one way; another day, I'll answer the other way, just to see what reasoning people bring to the table.

Mandala: Could you lead us through a short debate?

Ven. Namjong: Sure. A basic example goes like this:

The questioner says: "It follows that if something is a color, it necessarily is white."

The defender has only four standard answers: "Yes," "Why," "The reason is not established," and "No pervasion." If the defender agrees with the statement that if something is a color, it is necessarily white, he will reply "Yes."

The questioner will then try to posit something that is a color and not white. He might say, "Take the subject red. It follows that it is white."

The defender has the same choice of answers as before. If he agrees, he can say "Yes." But it is common sense that red is not white. If the defender asks, "Why?" then the questioner has to supply a reason that would establish that red is white. Since the defender has already agreed that whatever is a color is necessarily white, the questioner can say, "It follows that the subject red is white because of being a color."

When reasons are given, the defender has two standard answers. If he denies that the subject, i.e. red, is the predicate, i.e. a color, he will respond, "The reason is not established." The questioner will then have to give further reasons why red is a color.

If the defender agrees that red is a color, but whatever is a color is not necessarily white, then he will answer, "No pervasion."

But that pervasion was agreed to by the defender earlier in the debate, so now if he answers, "No pervasion," he will lose his earlier position.

If that happens, the questioner will say, or more often shout, "*Tsar*!" while slapping the back of his right hand on the palm of his left hand. *Tsar* means "finished," and here it signifies that the defender's original assertion has been defeated.

Mandala: It sounds more like a logic game than Dharma!

Ven. Namjong: At the beginning, one of the main goals is to teach technique, and this is easier if it is first done in relation to everyday objects like colors. So then it does look like just a game! But it would be a mistake to think that, because we use these same techniques to debate serious topics. This style of debate allows very sharp distinctions to be made. That helps to clarify important issues for both parties.

Mandala: Is it very competitive?

Ven. Namjong: Especially the first several years—and even now for some people—being *tsar* (defeated) can be like the end of the world. "That's not supposed to happen!" Because of that, some people defend more and more difficult positions because they don't want to go against what they've already said. That kind of competitive, "I'm gonna show him" attitude declines over time. I've been here over nine years and now I find debate pretty comfortable. Where I still see some showmanship and competitiveness is in the winter debate session where the monks from Sera, Drepung, and Ganden all debate together. That can generate some fireworks!

Personally, when I'm debating and I realize I've made a mistake, I like to be upfront, and say, "OK, give me a *tsar* and let's go down some more interesting avenues." And I admit I can be a bit of a showman too. For example, even if your opponent gives the "right" answer, you can act shocked—like they have said the craziest thing possible. If the opponent isn't confident in his position, he may start to doubt his position, which can make his answers deteriorate. Again, it isn't just about the right answer. I think of debate as performance art. That makes it more fun. One time, a visitor to the monastery saw us debating, complete with all the clapping and pushing, and thought we were practicing kung fu!

Mandala: It must be hard on the ego sometimes.

Ven. Namjong: Once in the first year I was here, I was trying to hold a point, and someone listening said, "You don't speak Tibetan very well. Why not?" How do you even respond to that? It was a real blow to my ego. Oftentimes the benefit of debate is just to watch how the ego plays its games. Some days I get totally crushed in debate. Even in my third year, there would be days when I would understand very little. And I would get a bit down, thinking, "I can't believe I've been here three years and I've barely understood anything my debate partner said!" It's good for us to see everything that's in the mind. The *lojong* teachings talk about bringing unconducive circumstances

onto the path. A lot of the learning is not even about the text, but going through an extremely difficult program and seeing how your mind reacts to different situations. And debate is really, really good for that.

When we debate, we have to watch our motivation. There is a tendency, after a debate when we go home, to look up different scriptural passages and think, "Oh, I really could have gotten him on this point!" We have to watch our motivation because the eight worldly concerns can come in, especially pride. Pride manifests as jealousy towards our superiors, competitiveness with our equals, and contempt for those we consider beneath us. For example, when we have our debate exam, they post our scores on a board along with our names for everyone to see. Then if we see someone score higher than us, even though we think we are "better" than him, the mind freaks out. For several years, as an antidote to this, I didn't even go to look at the results, but it was no use because all my classmates would look me up and tell me how I scored anyway! There is a balance though: because we do have a certain level of pride, we will study harder when the results are public. If we are skillful, we can actually use the ego to overcome ego.

Mandala: What are some of the ways debate has helped you?

Ven. Namjong: First, I often read passages and think I understand what they mean. Then in debate, I see that the things I had glossed over, thinking I had understood them, were more complex than I thought. So debate forces me to go deeper into the text to penetrate the meaning.

Second, having to debate in public where I have to reveal what I know and don't know pushes me to put consistent effort into studying. If any of us don't keep up with the class, debate makes that clear to everyone. I find this helps me to fight laziness!

Third, some topics have good reasons for arguing either side; there are many points of contention. The previous incarnation of Kyabje Song Rinpoche said that if there are no divergent views, then there are no scholars. Debate helps me appreciate and value the different positions. And it forces me think about things from different angles, and consider questions that wouldn't necessarily come to me if I were just studying on my own.

Last, being constantly confronted with things that I don't know is the best antidote to pride. As it says in the Jataka tales: "A fool who thinks he's wise is the real fool. A fool who knows he's a fool is at least wise in that regard." Discovering how little I actually know has been one of the best things for me. It has spurred me on to further inquiry, which will hopefully lead to more knowledge one day.

You know, I can't claim to have any understanding of the scriptures yet. But I can see that, thanks to the kindness of my gurus, debate really has benefited my mind and my practice.

15. Dr. Roger Jackson: Teaching Buddhism, Spreading Dharma

Mandala Online January–June 2017

An American born in England in 1950, Dr. Roger Jackson, Ph.D., has been teaching Buddhism since 1983. He is emeritus professor of Asian Studies and Religion at Carleton College in Minnesota, US, and the author of many academic articles as well the books Is Enlightenment Possible? *and* Tantric Treasures, *co-author of* The Wheel of Time: Kalachakra in Context, *editor of* The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems, *and co-editor of* Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre, Buddhist Theology, *and* Mahamudra and the Bka' brgyud Tradition. *His forthcoming book is tentatively entitled* Lamp So Bright: Mahamudra and the Geluk Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

Jackson talked to Mandala *associate editor Donna Lynn Brown about how Buddhism is taught in the West.*

Mandala: Roger, how did you meet the Dharma?

Jackson: At the end of college, my now-wife Pam and I set off on a "spiritual journey," arriving overland in India on January 1, 1974. We made our way to Nepal, where we saw some Tibetan Buddhism, but at that point, it seemed too exotic. We were about to head to Auroville in South India, but someone showed us a brochure for Kopan Monastery, and it hit us like a bolt of lightning. We realized that, if we were serious about spirituality, it was time to put up or shut up. So we registered for the spring 1974 course. We were incredibly impressed by the two lamas—they were the first religious people we'd met who seemed to embody what they taught. And they had this delightful bad cop/good cop routine. Lama Zopa would talk for days about the hells, then Lama Yeshe would come in and say, "Oh, but you have buddha nature."

Mandala: And what led you to study with Geshe Sopa?

Jackson: We found out Geshe Sopa was teaching Buddhist studies at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. That was a dream come true: to study with the teacher of the lamas we so esteemed. In my grad school application I wrote that I wanted to spread the Dharma in the West, and I still can't quite believe they let me in, because back then scholars were expected to be objective. But they did. Studying with Geshe Sopa was like getting a Gelug monastic education, but I also received a more Western religious studies perspective from professors like Stephen Beyer and Leonard Zwilling. They showed me that Tibet wasn't quite Shangri-la, and that Buddhism wasn't just philosophy but also a complicated social reality—actual people living their religion. My dissertation ended up being on a question that had confounded me back at Kopan: the beginninglessness of mind. I translated and discussed Dharmakirti's argument for past and future lives and the four noble truths, along with Gyaltsab Je's Tibetan commentary. It was later published as *Is Enlightenment Possible?* I got my Ph.D. and started teaching university in 1983.

Mandala: You've taught Buddhism in both universities and Dharma centers. What's the difference?

Jackson: In centers I mostly keep to the tradition. Most of my Dharma center teaching is working through Indian Buddhist texts with American Dharma students at Gyuto Wheel of Dharma

Monastery in Minneapolis. From Geshe Sopa, I learned the value of teaching directly from texts, so I present the text more or less as a geshe would—though I'm far from being a geshe!

A college or university is different. I teach by topic, and assign readings from various sources. Above all, I don't teach "Dharma." I help students understand Buddhism from an academic point of view. That includes the ideas from great texts, but from multiple perspectives rather than a single authority. In a typical class, I spend a few weeks on philosophy, making sure people know about the four noble truths, emptiness, the bodhisattva path, and so forth, but then I take them into areas like anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. For instance, we will investigate what Buddhism looks like on the ground in Sri Lanka or Tibet. And then we might examine a difficult ethical issue from a Buddhist perspective.

Mandala: What has it been like, as a Buddhist, to teach Buddhism in universities?

Jackson: When I started teaching in universities, I didn't like to admit that I was a practicing Buddhist—most of us in those days kept up this "objective" persona. Some people stayed quiet about being Buddhists until they got tenure. That wasn't necessary in Dharma centers. But then I taught for a while at a Jesuit university, and they made clear that they valued my Buddhist beliefs because they wanted not just a scholar but someone with whom they could engage in dialogue. I also came to understand that the notion of complete objectivity is ludicrous. So now I tell students I am a Buddhist. It may subtly affect how I explain things, and I want them to be able to call me on that.

Nowadays, it is easier to be an "insider." We understand that total objectivity doesn't exist; instead we are methodologically self-conscious, meaning we recognize and admit who we are and proceed as honestly as we can. It's a shift from modernism, which assumed that there could be a neutral stance or objective knowledge, to post-modernism, which recognizes that we all come with presuppositions. That shift freed people to be who they were. We still have to observe good professional boundaries. Proselytizing is not OK, for example, and we have to maintain a balance among competing views. But this change in the intellectual climate helped Buddhist studies to flourish by welcoming practicing Buddhists.

Mandala: How do young people take to the Buddhism they learn in universities?

Jackson: They seem to love it. I joke that one of my jobs is to pop their bubble. They arrive thinking Buddhism's so cool and Christianity's so square. Their idea of comparative religion is to contrast the Dalai Lama with the Spanish Inquisition. I have to level the playing field by pointing out that Tibetan history is fairly bloody too. Even so, a significant minority of undergraduates who study Buddhism take up meditation or get additional Buddhist teachings. Some participate in meditation and study programs in South Asia, the Himalayas, or Burma. Back in the 1970s, I wondered if the popularity of Buddhism in the West might die out with the baby boomers. That hasn't happened. I would guess that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is one reason. He's a superstar—he has drawn people to Buddhism. There have been skillful presentations of teachings in the West, by him and others, that have made Buddhism very compatible with modern ways of thinking. Western Buddhism focuses mostly on meditation and philosophy. It doesn't look quite the same as Buddhism in Asia—or in ethnically Asian Buddhist temples here.

Mandala: How do you teach tantra in a university? What is the objective, and how do you avoid passing on information that is intended for practitioners only?

Jackson: I taught a tantra course once, and one goal was to undo false impressions: "Tantric sex is a no-brainer for a whiskey man!" said one ad for Glenfiddich a few years back. Then, what I taught was academic material from the public domain. To convey what tantra is, I drew on *Tantra in Practice*, which is a collection of works by Western academics, and Geshe Tashi Tsering's *Tantra*, part of his Foundation of Buddhist Thought course. I talked about the role of embodiment and imagination in practice. Then I contextualized tantra historically in Indian traditions. One reason students think tantra is "cool" is because they've heard that the great Indian mahasiddhas were rebels against conventional society, but Christian Wedemeyer, in *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, shows that this claim is overblown: leaving the monastery to practice in a charnel ground was not uncommon in those days, and tantric practice—then and now—has generally been quite mainstream. So I explained tantra's nature and how it fit into Buddhist practice and society. It's worth teaching, because tantra is an important part of Asian religious culture, not only in Tibet but also in China, Japan, and Korea. Even Taoism has a tantric side.

Mandala: We often assume that university courses on Buddhism teach only philosophy, but now you also include practices—rituals, ceremonies, pilgrimage, daily life. Why?

Jackson: It's not what students start out thinking Buddhism is, so it's good for them to learn. If I had seen some of that material, I wouldn't have been so surprised when I got to Asia. When I started in Buddhist studies, almost everyone was studying philosophy. Over time, influences from psychology, history, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies worked their way in. Now, in Tibetan Buddhist studies, we see as many biographies coming out, for example, as books on doctrine—a sea change. Since it's my job to expose students to the latest scholarly perspectives, I teach on how Buddhism is practiced in real life, as well as discussing gender, power, social class, and so on. We may want only "truth," but Foucault showed us that truth is embodied and related to power. We can't escape that if we want to understand Buddhism. We can't only study philosophy. And learning how Buddhists live and practice doesn't scare students away. Most undergrads start out more interested in the ideas; I could do a whole course just on their questions about karma! But education means exposing people to the broader picture, and they come to appreciate that.

Mandala: There is now scientific research on the effects Buddhist practices, such as meditation and compassion, have on the brain. What impact is that having?

Jackson: It is definitely bringing people in. For example, psychology and science students take courses in Buddhism because they hear about Dr. Richard Davidson's research at the Center for Healthy Minds on the effects of meditation on the brain. They start out interested intellectually, then sometimes move toward practice. Because of this research, Buddhism gets seen as not just a "religion" like your parents had, but a science of mind. What gets shunted aside sometimes, though, is the traditional context of practices. Take Mahamudra: it may seem like a simple meditation—just mind seeing mind!—but it was always surrounded by ritual and devotion, and if you extract it from those, you lose something vital.

Mandala: You studied with Geshe Sopa in a university. Do geshes teach in universities now?

Jackson: Dezhung Rinpoche taught at the University of Washington in Seattle for many years, and Geshe Sopa was the first Tibetan religious teacher to get tenure in a Western university. Geshe Thupten Jinpa, Ph.D., sometimes oversees Ph.D. students at McGill in Montréal, Canada, and I believe Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi, Ph.D., does some teaching at Emory in Atlanta, Georgia. But I can't think of any Tibetan masters teaching full time in a North American university right now. One challenge is that geshes do not have Ph.Ds or training in the Western critical method—unless they also complete a Ph.D. And what is expected of scholars here, and the teaching style, are very different. The most common model is to invite lamas or geshes for periods of time to teach particular texts or topics. That works well.

Mandala: Can you take a critical stance in Dharma centers the way you can in a university?

Jackson: In a university, we are expected to be historical and critical, but we can be that way in Dharma centers too, even while respecting traditional teachers and teachings. In fact, the ability to shift between one and the other is useful. I think I am invited to teach at Dharma centers because I have academic as well as traditional training, and can talk about both. That's what I do at Gyuto: I stay within the tradition by teaching texts more or less the way a geshe would, but I bring in my academic perspective by giving historical context and discussing points of controversy. Scholars of Buddhist studies can enrich what is taught in Dharma centers by including important historical, social, and philosophical issues.

Mandala: Are Tibetan Buddhist Dharma centers drawing closer to academic Buddhist studies?

Jackson: It varies. Some centers invite academics, like Jeffrey Hopkins, to teach. I have given talks on Mahamudra at Sravasti Abbey in Washington State. Most centers now understand that Buddhist academics won't undermine the tradition; we are conversant with both traditional and academic approaches, and can discuss similarities and differences. So the wall is eroding. We shouldn't think the Dharma can't stand up to critical and historical analyses of the kind applied by academics.

Mandala: Has the teaching at Tibetan Buddhist Dharma centers evolved over time?

Jackson: Not that much. Gelug centers have mostly stayed quite traditional. They still focus on lamrim, for example, without much Westernization. Students sometimes want more meditation, but that's an adjustment Gelug centers haven't always made. One result is a steady trickle of Gelug students going to Nyingma teachers to learn Dzogchen. John Makransky, Anne Klein, and B. Alan Wallace are prominent examples. So that's one issue to consider. Another is how centers can serve both ordinary people and more serious practitioners. Mingyur Rinpoche, a Kagyu-Nyingma master, has created two tracks in his Tergar organization: one for busy lay people with a secular orientation, and the second for those who want to do a more "Buddhist" practice. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also stresses basic teachings for secular people, and more intense practice for those so inclined. I wonder if Gelug organizations should consider creating different tracks as well.

Mandala: As they progress, do Dharma students need to go to monasteries or other practice centers for higher teachings? Can their own centers meet their needs?

Jackson: Advanced students can keep benefiting from centers, I think, depending on the center. Deer Park in Wisconsin is one example. Classic texts are taught there throughout the year. These

have infinite depths and can be studied over and over. And then Deer Park's summer courses, currently taught by Jangtse Chöje Rinpoche, intensively cover major texts. That might be the ideal kind of center for advanced students. But even if a center doesn't have intensive teachings, many have geshes or lamas with whom students can have a personal relationship, and who can give private teachings and guidance. Advanced students at smaller centers might stay part of the community, share rituals, and so on, but then travel for specific teachings or retreats. There are courses and retreats around the world; older students who are retired often travel to take advantage of opportunities. For younger students with fewer resources, going to India or Nepal is a way to get teachings or do retreat at a lower cost. People are traveling quite a bit nowadays to get the experiences they want.

Mandala: How can Buddhist organizations deal with difficult areas where cultures clash—gender, power relations, and so on?

Jackson: We are still early in the transmission of Dharma to the West. It's good that we speak out, but change is not as simple as saying "this is unfair." Our teachers come from monastic institutions that are very different from our Dharma centers. Western culture is a big adjustment. So we need patience. We can work for change, but we need to hold on to what is good, too. "Buddhist theology" is intended to translate Buddhism for the West, but also to bring into Buddhism the best the West has to offer, politically, culturally, and intellectually—such as a historical consciousness—to help shape the Dharma's contemporary manifestations. We need to integrate the modern without losing what is essential. The result won't be one version of Buddhism, universally applied. We will have a spectrum of Buddhisms, from a modernist wing that focuses mostly on philosophy or meditation as applied to contemporary life, to a more conservative wing that preserves traditional prayers, rituals, and ideas. The Buddha gave 84,000 teachings, so we can have more than one approach. And although I advocate patience, I am confident that it won't take as long as the proverbial bird's wing wearing down Mount Meru. We will figure it out.

16. Jacob Sky Lindsley: Mindfulness and Madhyamaka

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Jacob Sky Lindsley is a graduate of two Buddhist schools in the US, having received a bachelor degree from the University of the West near Los Angeles, California, and a master of arts degree from FPMT-affiliated Maitripa College in Portland, Oregon. He has worked for both Vajrapani Institute and Maitripa College, and commences Ph.D. studies in psychology in 2017. His master's thesis, Mindfulness and the Transformation of the Self, *examines the relationship between mindfulness therapies and the Madhyamaka philosophy of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. He presented a paper based on this at the November 2016 conference of the Mind and Life Institute.*

Lindsley spoke with Mandala *associate editor Donna Lynn Brown.*

Mandala: What led you to look at how Madhyamaka (Middle Way) philosophy* intersects with mindfulness?

Lindsley: I've spent a lot of time mulling over the Madhyamaka view of self as empty of inherent existence, and working with its meditations that help show that the true self that we think exists really can't be found. This has convinced me that, as Buddhism maintains, our wrong view of self creates suffering. But I also have a background in psychology, so I wanted to see how mindfulness—so important in psychology now—gets at that root cause of suffering. What I found was that mindfulness-based therapies do not deconstruct the sense of self in the same way as, say, Gelugpa-style meditations. So I wanted to explore how mindfulness therapies understand the self they posit, and transform our relationship with it, compared to how the Gelug teachings do that.

I'm not trying to show that mindfulness helps people or doesn't; other researchers have shown that it often does, and are now drilling down to understand who it helps and in what circumstances. Where there is not much clarity at this point is about *how* and *why* it helps. There are several theories, and researchers are working on it. What I'm doing is looking at how mindfulness transforms people's relationship with the self, because that helps explain what is going on when they practice mindfulness. I think it can also illuminate how mindfulness helps—and also maybe why that help could be limited in impact.

Some of the questions I'm asking are: can mindfulness, as it is practiced therapeutically, cut the root of suffering as understood in Buddhism? If not, does it at least take a step in that direction? Or does it perpetuate or even strengthen our innate distorted view of the self? If that's what's going on, can mindfulness-based therapies be reworked to draw on the Madhyamaka view in order to better address suffering?

As far as I know, no one else is looking at mindfulness from a Madhyamaka perspective. I'd like to get that conversation going.

Mandala: We hear the word "mindfulness" used in various ways. Can you clarify just what it means?

Lindsley: According to Buddhist theory, mindfulness is the mental factor that remembers to stay cognizant of the intended object of any particular moment of cognition. So if the breath is the object, mindfulness would remember to keep the breath in mind while another factor like attention would hold awareness on the breath. But nowadays we hear the word used in several ways. For example, it can refer to a kind of meditation, or to a way of being in ordinary life. Jon Kabat-Zinn says mindfulness is "paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally," which can refer to both meditation and to being mindful as we go about our day. And then psychology uses the word for certain clinical interventions: mindfulness-based therapies. With respect to meditation, there are various kinds: mindfulness of breathing, of the body, of walking, and so on; of close attention to one factor or broader choiceless awareness. So mindfulness is an umbrella term for lots of things.

Mandala: Before we talk more about psychology, can you sum up the Buddhist approach to self?

Lindsley: All schools of Buddhism believe that a transformed experience of the self is what leads to liberation and enlightenment—the end of suffering. Shantideva, for example, makes clear that all the techniques the Buddha taught were meant to lead to a direct insight into no-self, meaning realizing that the self we think we have just isn't there. And Buddhism says that all of our negative emotions and psychological issues are mediated by our relationship to this false idea. So getting at the sense of self and transforming it is fundamental to how Buddhism deals with suffering, whether we uproot suffering entirely by realizing that this type of self doesn't exist and removing that appearance from our minds, or, in a shorter-term sense, reducing our suffering by easing our grasping at this wrong idea of self.

Mandala: Is it a problem if mindfulness works with the self in a different way than Madhyamaka?

Lindsley: Not necessarily. If people find mindfulness helps them, that may be good enough. It might even be great. But there are two potential issues. One is that mindfulness-based approaches to reducing suffering may obscure a powerful key to healing and well-being that is central to Buddhism because it's been proven to work—by that I mean insight into the true nature of the self. People may forget that Buddhism has perhaps more powerful methods to eliminate suffering if they think mindfulness is all that Buddhism has to offer from a therapeutic point of view. Second, the way mindfulness therapies operate may actually reinforce an innate belief in the truly-existing self. If so, that might make for short-term gain in exchange for long-term vulnerability. That's because trading one kind of self-experience for another can help us feel better, but if Buddhist philosophy is true, undermining this innate belief is the only way to remove the potential to suffer in general. This is a pretty radical idea!

Mandala: What are the similarities in the understanding of suffering between Buddhist philosophy and mindfulness-based therapies?

Lindsley: Like Buddhism, often these therapies are based on the idea of distortion: depression, for example, and other difficulties are influenced by seeing reality in a biased way. Some people

organize their experience mentally in ways that are just not accurate. Maybe they are convinced they are inherently stupid or worthless, or they can never succeed at anything, or their life will never be OK—those kinds of things. Most of us do this a little. But people who struggle with mental or emotional problems often have negative cognitive patterns or self-understandings that significantly impair their ability to function, or just make them really unhappy. These are almost always evaluations of a self. And one purpose of mindfulness is to transform that distorted sense of self to make it more realistic. The reduction in distortion then reduces suffering, generally speaking.

Buddhist philosophy also emphasizes distortion. Buddhist teachers will say that the core lesson of Buddhism is to see without distortion: just seeing reality as it is will be enough, without changing anything else, to end suffering. For example, we believe that things that are impermanent are permanent and get upset when we are proven wrong. We grab at things we are sure will make us happy and are shocked when we get hurt. This is samsara, and it's based on distortion. The most deep-rooted distortion is our experience of self. Many Buddhist practices ease our grasping at this mistaken sense of self and that reduces our suffering.

So that sounds similar, doesn't it? But we have to be careful because the definitions of self are different, and so are the ways that their practices transform the sense of self.

Mandala: How do the ideas of self in mindfulness-based therapies differ from Buddhist ideas?

Lindsley: Even though mindfulness has roots in Buddhism, the therapies based on it use Western notions of self. The main mindfulness-based therapies more or less rely on three types of self-experience.

First, they talk about a "narrative" sense of self. This is the story that each of us constructs about who we are in the past, present, and future. This is what we refer to when someone asks us to describe ourselves. When we ruminate, we manufacture a narrative of who we are.

Second, there is an "experiential" sense of self. This refers to our ongoing stream of experiences: thoughts, actions, perceptions. This is the content of consciousness. It includes self-talk, mental imagery, emotions as they are experienced—not the character inside the story, which is the narrative self, but the moment-by-moment experience before we fashion it into a story.

The third is the "perspectival" sense of self. This is the sense of being a consciousness that subjectively observes or experiences thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It is a background awareness.

Whenever we say "I," we may mean any or all of these. We don't often notice that in ordinary life we have these ever-shifting understandings of "I," but looking at this schema, you can see that we do. All of these together, in a way, constitute what Buddhists might call the conventional self. They are always changing, and not, by Buddhist standards, actually findable as "Me" with a capital "M." Buddhism would say that these kinds of experiences are not, by themselves, the root of our problems. The root is deeper: it's an innate sense of an "I" that is real, solid, enduring, and "me," and that we believe we can find somewhere in or around our minds or bodies.

Mandala: How do mindfulness practices impact the self, when the self is categorized in these Western ways?

Lindsley: Researchers are finding that negative self-assessments and negative interpretations of events play a big role in a lot of emotional illnesses, and almost all of this is self-referential, meaning our interpretations—which cause us pain and even ravage our lives—are almost always related to how we see ourselves. As a result, these therapies target the narrative self: they work to change unhelpful and probably inaccurate stories about who we are. Mindfulness plays a central role. Instead of trying to counteract painful thoughts or feelings, mindfulness changes how we experience them. We become aware of negative memories, feelings, or thoughts, we watch them come and go, and we learn to accept them in a non-judgmental way as just passing experiences. So the experiences still happen but aren't *problematized*. This actually alters the narrative self. It takes away its teeth. And psychological outcomes improve.

Mandala: Does that really *work*?

Lindsley: Yes, because whenever we experience a distressing event, how real, or maybe how relevant, we perceive it to be affects how much we suffer. By perceiving what happens as a mere mental event, and not tying it into a bigger story, such as "this is why my life can never improve," and not ruminating about it, we are not so deeply impacted. Some people call this "decentering." With decentering, painful thoughts or feelings are not seen as necessarily valid reflections of reality or "myself." There is a broader perspective. And the thoughts or feelings are defused; we see ourselves "thinking" instead of being the thought. We can step away from the pain our thoughts cause. It works. So decentering is one of the main things people learn in therapeutic mindfulness practices.

Decentering can be described as a move away from the narrative self toward the experiential or perspectival self. This reduces the power of the narrative because people stop identifying it as "self." What is self is widened. We observe thoughts rather than engage with them, shifting the locus of identity. You've likely heard of or done meditations like slowly eating a raisin, experiencing every moment of that taste, or meditatively walking, feeling the floor under your feet … these are ways of shifting identification from thoughts to experiences, or, to say it in another way, from the narrative self to the experiential self. In this broader experiencing, the narrative loses some of its power.

Mandala: What about the third sense of self—perspectival?

Lindsley: Some mindfulness exercises lead us to a perspectival sense of self, particularly meditations in which we develop awareness of being aware. This is seeing and identifying with the "observer" mind; a transcendent sense of self. This also works, but is perhaps a little less common in mindfulness-based therapies.

Mandala: If we just lived in the perspectival self all the time, would we be happy?

Lindsley: The point of mindfulness isn't to always live in any one mode, but to be able to move easily among them. This weakens the narrative sense of self, which is often the source of mental or

emotional problems. Being able to choose among these senses of self also gives people greater mental strength and resilience. The point is to not hold so tightly to our stories about who we are and what has happened to us and where we are going and so on. When people talk about being mindful and staying in the present, that's one way of understanding what they mean. They can shift into an awareness centered more in experience than thought.

Mandala: How does that compare to the Buddhist goal of realizing the lack of an inherently existing self?

Lindsley: One of the goals of mindfulness is to move people away from identifying with a painful, destructive kind of self and toward identifying with a more adaptive self: going from the always-thinking narrative self to either the experiential or perspectival self.

This does help people. But it is far less radical than realizing the emptiness of that self. Buddhism would say that attributing an identity to any aspect of our experience is going to lead to suffering. So identifying with the experiential or perspectival self is not liberation. It's less suffering than identifying with, say, a ruminating, paranoid narrative self. But from a Buddhist perspective we are still making a mistake by finding a self in *any* of these places and identifying with it. The self we identify with, no matter how subtle, does not inherently exist, and believing it does is going to create suffering. Actually, modern cognitive sciences get that; they understand that the self as we conceive it is not a findable entity, it's just a special kind of conceptual activity. But then Madhyamaka adds to that conclusion by making clear that this self goes beyond the conceptual; it's a visceral, innate experience that is at the very root of our emotional life. Changing our ideas doesn't change it because it runs so deep. We "know" intuitively that it is there—and we are wrong. Our minds actually create this self, like a hallucination, and then we believe in it. That leads to trouble. And we can't really help doing it.

Mandala: I'm guessing that mindfulness alone doesn't remove this misconception.

Lindsley: Exactly. The Gelug Madhyamaka meditation tradition that I've been studying counteracts the distorted sense of self by using deep analytical meditation, not just mindfulness. First, analysis generates a certain state of mind and then second, the meditator abides as stably as possible in that state. The idea is to bring to mind as clearly as possible the appearance we have of the self. That is called "the object of negation." Then, we experience a contradiction between this appearance and reality because, using all the reasoning and logic we can muster, we come to see that what appears to our minds is not findable where we suppose it ought to be. We apprehend an absence, essentially, where we expect to find this self we believe we have. Then we abide in that feeling of not finding. After the meditation, the habitual sense of self will return, but over time the contradiction fosters increasing doubt about the self being what we think it is. By repeating the meditation again and again, an understanding develops and deepens. We start to see that the self we perceive is a kind of hallucination, and we stop believing in it. We still exist! But the self does not exist in quite the way we believe; it is not self-existent, independent, partless, permanent, and so on. We are told that this distorted sense of self will eventually disappear altogether and we won't be bothered by it anymore. Wouldn't that be amazing?

So you can see that the Gelug approach is different from mindfulness, and so is its result. The Gelug method seems to be able to *eliminate* our distorted conception of the self, not just help people create a more adaptive sense of self. An over-focus on mindfulness to improve well-being obscures this traditional Buddhist method for confronting our habitual relationship to self and leaves untouched its potential for ending suffering. It just moves the attribution of self from the story, the narrative self, to another part of the self, the flow of experience or the awareness. But it still ascribes "self" or "I" to those things. That's because it doesn't offer any counteracting force to weaken or remove this false apprehension. Instead of saying "I am my story," we say "I am these sensations" or "I am this awareness of the passing flow." But the mistake, the hallucination of "I," is still 100 percent there. Some people imply that mindfulness leads practitioners to seeing through the illusion of self, but I doubt this could be true: the problematic self that we believe in so heartily has not been identified or fully countered.

Mandala: Are you saying mindfulness is not so good?

Lindsley: No, no, don't misunderstand me. Mindfulness can be life-changing for some people. Greater control over attention, more flexibility in responding to emotions and events, and more perspective in our relationship to concepts are all demonstrably useful therapeutic tools. Mindfulness encourages people to be with experience differently and that can be tremendously helpful. And it has been shown to reduce all sorts of symptoms of common clinical issues.

Mandala: What do you see as the way forward?

Lindsley: I think there are reasons to consider expanding the study of meditation-based therapies, and their effects, to include the Buddhist understanding of self. The Gelug practice I've described may not be for everyone. But it could help some people. It may also be possible for mindfulness techniques to address the Buddhist notion of a false self more directly by encouraging a reduced identification of any aspect of the body-mind as the self. Care needs to be taken; there are people who might be harmed by practices that undermine whatever sense of self they have. But it seems that for some people, deepening their understanding of the lack of a truly existing self could make them happier and perhaps promote adaptive qualities like altruism. After all, if attributing "self" to ever-evolving experience creates suffering, doing less of it should reduce suffering. That would have to be tested, so pulling these meditations into social science research makes sense. I believe that science can open itself up more to examining Buddhist concepts; they should not be dismissed as just religious ideas. They are testable. Mindfulness came from Buddhism, after all, and is now widely used in secular therapeutic contexts. Stopping believing in a hallucinated self may also be profoundly therapeutic.

I also suspect that mindfulness-based therapies could indirectly undermine the belief in a truly-existing self. As psychology looks for explanations of why or how meditation helps people, I think seeing self-grasping as a spectrum having various levels could be useful. Mindfulness may not uproot self-grasping, but it may loosen it to some extent—moving people along that spectrum. In other words, just the act of moving the sense of self from one domain of experience to another may give people some insight into the process of self-attribution, thereby lessening self-grasping. This could contribute in some cases to the positive outcomes from mindfulness we now see.

My hope is that psychology can take this Buddhist concept of no-self more seriously and really consider its implications for human suffering. If that happens, there can be more study of how meditations that deconstruct the innate sense of self can help people. That's what I would like my work to lead to.

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Notes:

*Madhyamaka means "middle way" in Sanskrit. It refers to a centrist view of selves and other phenomena, neither eternalist nor nihilist, in which their existence is not substantiated by any eternal essence, but neither do they have no basis for existing at all. They exist by way of dependent origination. In other words, Madhyamaka philosophers propound the Buddha's ultimate view of reality: phenomena, including selves, exist conventionally but are empty of inherent existence.

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